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# Offender Families as Victims and Their Role in Offender Reintegration

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# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

Catherine Pfeiffer

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
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Walden University  
2018

Abstract

Offender Families as Victims and Their Role in Offender Reintegration

by

Catherine Pfeiffer

MHA, Texas State University, 1996

BA, The University of Texas at Austin, 1990

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Forensic Psychology

Walden University

February 2018

## Abstract

Ninety-five percent of all offenders are released, most of whom return to family members who have suffered greatly from their loved one's criminal behavior; yet, research on their victimization and trauma is rare. Additionally, families anticipate a role in the offender's reintegration; however, little research has explored their own recovery and insights on their reintegrative efforts. This qualitative phenomenological study sought to discover a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of 13 offender family members in Texas. Participants were recruited through community organizations and selected through a purposeful sampling strategy to ensure diversity. The data were collected through screening and face-to-face interviews and analyzed through iterative hand coding and thematic development, supported by secondary coding review and participant verification. Concepts explored included victimization within a trauma-informed environment, whereby support systems understand the impact of trauma on individuals and reintegration within a restorative justice model, which aims to restore individual and community trust. Results found that participants voiced consistent themes of victimization, presented effective coping mechanisms and overall continued relationships with friends, family members, and the community. Findings also showed that participants anticipated roles of both emotional and instrumental support and reported an interest in their involvement with a restorative justice option for the offender upon his reentry. The findings draw no definitive conclusions on the degree of family member victimization but do promote social change for developing policies that collaboratively engage family members within the judicial and reentry process to reduce recidivism.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my family, the biggest support system I could ever have asked for. To my husband, Frank Stencer, who sacrificed years of adventurous weekends, and traded them for hearing more about a population of individuals than he ever imagined; to my mother, Madelaine Warren, who unwittingly became my editor-in-chief and listener to all things criminal; and to my sister, Lisa Mais, who consistently offered food and coffee breaks, when she had little time of her own. They have each heard of my desire to earn a PhD in Forensic Psychology for decades, and they have each contributed to this goal being achieved – a gift for which I cannot give ample appreciation.

## Acknowledgments

This study could not have taken form without the help of many people, some of whom I have not yet met in person, and countless others who I may never meet, but for whom this study aims to one day help. Dr. Kristen Beyer inspired me to not overthink the process and never lose the joy with my subject. Dr. Christopher Bass provided me with the understanding of the methodological framework that fit for my inquiry. Deanna Deaton, a classmate and associate researcher with her own personal experiences with the subject matter, contributed great insight with interview questions and greatly assisted with attaining data credibility through her work with code and theme analysis. Dr. Rachel Condry solidified my subject interest with her shared perspective on the aggrieved family member, demonstrated fictionally in *We Need to Talk About Kevin* and her own passionate ethnographic work in *Families Shamed*.

Finally, this study could not have gained traction without the help of the 13 offender family members who willingly allowed a stranger into their lives, inquiring of personal and traumatic events, with only a promise that I would not exploit their painful stories. Their simultaneous pain and loving devotion deserves recognition, and their willingness to assist their retuning loved ones, who otherwise are often seen negatively within communities, warrants applause and support.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

### **Introduction**

Newly released FBI data indicates all-category violent crime rose, and property crime demonstrated a modest reduction in 2016 (Federal Bureau of Investigations, 2016); yet, the overall crime rate remains about half that of 1990's data, when the crime rate peaked in 1991 at 5,856 per 100,000 people (Friedman, Grawert, and Cullen, 2017). Even with declining numbers, the United States currently houses over 2.2 million individuals within local jails and state and federal prisons (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2016a), maintaining its position as the country with the largest and fastest incarceration rate in the world, placing every 693 of 100,000 individuals behind bars annually (Prison Policy Initiative, 2016). Additionally, 95% of all criminal offenders are released back into communities, with 80% on parole supervision (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2016b). While as sobering as all of these statistics may be, beneath all of the data lie the stories of individuals – rarely seen, often criticized, and profoundly impacted by the offenses. Known as family, but rarely identified as victims, offender family members suffer greatly at the outcome of their loved one's criminal behavior. My goal with this qualitative study was to add new research to the literature on the lived experiences of offender families, including their perceptions of their victimization and abilities to aid in the offender's reintegration.

Some may argue that only the direct victims of criminal behavior deserve attention and access to scarce resources for repairing harm and building resiliency, while the families of the offenders should face their own private trials for their culpability in the

offender's behavior (Condry, 2007). What remains missing in the discussion of criminal behavior is the impact that criminal behavior has on entire communities, including direct victims of crime and the families of those who have offended. Rearrest rates are as high as 67.6%, eight years after release (United States Sentencing Commission, 2016), and while criminogenic risk factors are varied and complex, so too are the factors that aid and support successful reintegration. In this study, my focus was on one primary source of successful reentry – the offender's family.

The importance of this phenomenological study rests on the fact that upon release, most offenders, the legal system, and the community assume that family members are not only willing, but able to provide the necessary emotional and instrumental support for the offender's return (Naser & La Vigne, 2006; Taylor, 2016); however, without addressing how the families themselves have been victimized by the offender's criminal behavior and subsequent absence, this process for successful reintegration and reduced recidivism will fail.

In this study, I sought a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of offender family members by exposing their own victimization and needs for reentry facilitation, making their needs known to their community and social agencies that may be instrumental in providing necessary support and healing. Providing services to these families is critical, especially as these families are the ones entrusted by the community to help reduce recidivism. This is not meant to undermine the social work currently provided in communities for the direct victims of crime, but to expand those services to include family members, as indirect victims of crime, also in need of social service, such

as personal and family therapy, stress and anger management, or access to financial and/or housing resources.

This chapter includes an outline of the research problem and purpose of the study, including the specific research questions and subquestions. It also includes a brief overview of past research, intended to illuminate the gaps in research which led to the need for this study.

### **Background**

Hans von Hentig identified victimology in the 1940s, when he postulated that if one can be born to be a criminal, then one can also be born to be a victim. He also contended, under this same premise, that a victim is oftentimes complicit in the criminal act (Von Hentig, 1940). The 1980s ushered in a new understanding of victimization, raising awareness of the emotional, financial, and physical toll placed upon victims of crime. This advanced a sense of empathy for the individual and the recognition that the victim would experience a level of trauma-induced stress (Janoff-Bulman, 1985).

Societies' cultures have advanced to accept that under no circumstance should the victim be blamed for their situation (Carson, 2015), it is rarely discussed in victimology whether the offender family members, as indirect victims, should be afforded the same empathy or rights as direct victims of crime. Offender families are often expected to serve as the facilitators of reintegration (Taylor, 2016) upon the offender's release, and instead of support, are left carrying the shame and stigmatization of the offender's behavior (Condry, 2007). Upon coming to the aid of the offender, and denying their involvement in the crime, offender family members place themselves at even greater risk

of social stigma, while simultaneously limiting their own acceptance of their accumulated trauma (Condry, 2007). This familial and protective behavior places offender families at risk for victim blaming by those who wish to make sense of injustice or social wrongs by believing that the families' misfortunes are due to their "thoughts, characters or actions" (Harber, Podolski, & Williams, 2015, p. 1).

Upon acceptance that a victim can "suffer at the hands of the perpetrator" (Baumeister, Exline & Sommer, 1998, p. 79), little question should remain that family members also suffer as a result of the offender's crime; yet, victimology and criminology literature yields no evidence supporting this assertion, and the field of psychology, though purporting to be the dominant source of understanding the victim's mental constitution (Siegel, 1983), makes no mention of the offender family as such.

An indirect victim's suffering takes its form in loss of financial security, fear of reprisal from community members, wide-ranging psychological problems from grief and anger to depressive, anxiety or trauma disorders, uncertainty of one's own role in the commission of the crime or at a minimum, denial of behavior (Condry, 2007). In some cases acute stress results in rising and sustained levels of cortisol, which increases blood pressure and glucose levels, leaving individuals at risk for physical maladies and chronic pain (Babbel, 2010; Prossin, Koch, Campbell, Barichello, Zalcman, & Zubieta, 2016). If these indirect victims remain unrecognized and untreated, adverse consequences may result, gravely impacting their personal and emotional well-being, leaving them poorly equipped to recover independently and serve as a mechanism by which the offender successfully reintegrates.



The offender family's understanding of their role as victim, and their attempts to find psychological support and their own level of forgiveness may still have little influence on successful offender reintegration if the offender's dynamic criminogenic conditions remain (i.e. few job skills or low literacy); however, the indirect victim will have developed a profound protective element of self-support, which may serve as a buffer to future trauma upon the offender's return. An example of this would be the offender family's recognition of attempted manipulation by the offender, and their developed abilities for setting boundaries. "Criminogenic conditions are those environments and experiences to which people are exposed that increase the likelihood that they will engage in criminal behavior" (Greene, Haney, & Hurtado, 2000, p. 4). Criminogenic conditions include antisocial values and beliefs, criminal friends, untreated mental disorders or substance abuse, poverty and poor educational achievement. Although these are only a few additional factors underlying offender recidivism, they extend the scope of this study, which addresses only the offender family's understanding of their trauma and victimization and their personal resiliency in seeking psychological support to assist the offender's reintegration.

Significant research has been conducted from the offender's perspective on reintegration requirements and expectations (Baer et al., 2006; Bahr, 2015; Blanchette & Taylor, 2009; Davis, Bahr, & Ward, 2012; Haney, 2001; Shapiro & Schwartz, 2001; Visser & O'Connell, 2012), and studies have also demonstrated that improving family engagement during an individual's incarceration may help lessen familial strain and improve recidivism outcomes (Bales & Mears, 2008; Ohlin, 1951; Hairston, 1991). Yet, a

significant gap in the research remains in the study of offender families' personal lived experiences of victimization and emotional trauma, most notably within the context of the offender's family members' lives from the time of arrest through the offender's return (Marlow, Nyamathi, Bautita, & Grajeda, 2015; Naser & Visser, 2006; Shollenberger, 2009). With little research conducted on this population, especially in terms of their own perspective of victimization and personal needs related to serving a role in reintegration, I sought to conduct this study to fill this gap in the literature.

This study allowed offender family members a rare opportunity to speak to their personal experience of criminal behavior, affording them the chance to be heard as victims of crime, an opportunity rarely afforded within the context of the criminal justice process. Additionally, whether offender family members are complicit in the offender's behavior is irrelevant and misguided, as the blame must rest solely upon the criminal offender for their actions. Providing this study's findings to policy makers within areas of the justice system, such as the Texas Department of Criminal Justice Reentry Division, or to thought leaders on victimization, may elevate the conversation from who is to blame to who suffers as a result of criminal behavior, bringing offender family members into a broader discussion of how they can seek acceptance and anticipate support to effectively heal from their trauma and positively support returning offenders. This study explored the lived experiences of offender families and their perceptions of their victimization and trauma, as well as their strengths and limitations to aid in reintegration, which may help facilitate a positive step towards lowering recidivism.

### **Problem Statement**

Ninety-five percent of all criminal offenders are released back into communities (Davis, Bahr, & Ward, 2012), and most of them, with little resources immediately available to them, will return to their families, who are expected to play an integral role in the offender's reintegration (Naser & La Vigne, 2006; Shapiro & Schwartz, 2001). Offenders' families, victimized by the reality of the criminal behavior and traumatized by the removal of an essential part of their system, face the challenges of reconstructing their lives around the loss, as well as community victim-blaming and stigmatization (Harber et al., 2015). Additionally, these families are confronted with psychological trauma, experience emotional reactions and are forced to develop coping mechanisms few have sought to understand (Ofori-Dua, Akuoko, & de Paul Kanwetuu, 2015; Naser & Visser, 2006). Parents lose a child; siblings are deprived of a confidant; spouses spend years alone; children feel abandoned; finances are stretched; lawyers become part of the family; and visitation is marred by distance and cost (Duwe & Clark, 2013; Grinstead, Faigles, Bancroft, & Zack, 2001; Hairston, 1991).

Gaining insight into the offender families' sense of victimization and psychological trauma is both relevant and meaningful to the field of forensic psychology--and the broader interest of societal eudemonia--for its exploration into the role that families play in successful offender reintegration. Understanding their needs and capabilities for seeking psychological healing and developing new skills will further advance their own abilities to provide emotional and instrumental support (Taylor, 2016) to the returning offender. Successful reintegration is a daunting task by any measure,

especially; 68% of past offenders are rearrested within three years of their release (National Institute of Justice, 2014). If the offender's family is believed by community members or law enforcement as either complicit in the offender's crime (Melendez, Lichtenstein, & Dolliver, 2016) or somehow unable to assist with the reintegration (Shapiro & Schwartz, 2001), then those individuals within the community who are likely to provide social services or outreach will likely not actively support the families' efforts and interests in diminishing the risk of recidivism, an activity in direct conflict with the goals of many reentry programs (Levenson & Tewksbury, 2009; Taylor, 2016).

### **Purpose of the Study**

This phenomenological qualitative study explored the level of victimization and emotional trauma experienced by offender family members, irrespective of the type of crime committed by the offender. I sought to examine offender family members' perceptions of necessary psychological support and community empathy to effectively perform their anticipated roles in the offender's reentry to reduce recidivism. To address the gap in previous research, in-depth interviews with recruited, adult family members examined their lived experiences from the moment of arrest and throughout the judicial process. This exploration included their anticipated roles upon the offender's reentry, which provided insight into their perceived emotional, physical, social and financial traumas, resulting from the offender's crime, as well as their activities aimed at healing their personal pain.

### **Research Questions**

This research was driven by two central questions--with each supported by related subquestions--aimed at understanding the lived experiences of offender family members, and the phenomena of emotional trauma through their victimization and their anticipated role in reintegration.

Research Question 1: What is the personal meaning of victimization and resulting emotional trauma, as experienced by offender family members, resulting from the offender's crime?

Subquestion 1: What emotions do offender family members experience after their loved one is arrested and throughout the trial and sentencing process?

Subquestion 2: What physical reactions do offender family members experience throughout the entire legal process?

Subquestion 3: How has the experience of becoming an offender family member affected relationships with friends/neighbors/other family members/larger community?

Subquestion 4: How do offender family members psychologically cope with the absence of their loved one?

Research Question 2: How do offender family members identify their roles in the offender's reentry and reintegration process?

Subquestion 1: What specific roles do offender family members anticipate having once their loved one reenters the community?

Subquestion 2: What sources of support do offender families require to fulfill their anticipated roles?

### **Conceptual Framework for the Study**

The phenomenon of offender family victimization and resulting trauma is related to the overarching concept of *trauma-informed care*, whereby impacted individuals and those who provide comfort and support understand the resulting reactions and suffering caused by damaging circumstances. The concept of *restorative justice* (RJ) grounds the phenomenon of the offender family member's lived experiences and expectations of their role in the offender's reentry and reintegration. I applied a constructivist model for gathering, analyzing, interpreting, and reporting data. After collecting and coding data, I used inductive reasoning to draw conclusions. I chose this model as the most appropriate method, as the study's participants had an opportunity to share their contextual concerns for their victimization and roles in reintegration, and the interpretations of findings developed from self-perceptions of their lived experiences.

### **Trauma Informed Care**

Offender family members experience victimization and subsequent traumatic reactions, as a result of the offender's criminal behavior and the loss of the offender to the criminal justice system. Should these family members seek assistance from helping professionals and social services, the individuals offering these services must be trauma-informed. Many individuals face wide-ranging traumatic experiences, and the more that professionals understand about the emotional harm and stress resulting from trauma, the more likely it is that services provided to these victims would be administered in a manner that is sensitive to the trauma the individual endured (Wilson, Pence, & Conradi, 2013). Much of what is known and understood today about trauma, comes through

increased recognition and understanding of the damage caused by childhood sexual abuse, incest and violence against women, and trauma experienced by war veterans over the past century (Herman, 1997). The definition of trauma has also expanded to include victims of natural disasters (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA], 2014).

Offender family members, having experienced loss and emotional suffering, experience trauma resulting from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and physical, social, emotional or spiritual well-being. (SAMHSA, 2014, p. 7)

Yet, this distinct group has been excluded from all current academic review and discussion related to trauma-informed theory and care. My goal for this study was to correct for this exclusion. This lack of research evidence is further explored in Chapter 2.

### **Restorative Justice**

The concept of restorative justice (RJ) has played a prominent role in many of the world's oldest judicial systems, aimed at restoring individual healing and community trust (Braithwaite, 1998; Gavrielides, 2011; Wenzel, Okimoto, Feather, & Platow, 2008). Commonly understood to play the primary roles in an RJ system are the direct victim, key community members and the offender (Bazemore, 1998). Only more recently have family members of the offender been given a place within this process (Metze, Abma, & Kwekkeboom, 2015; Zehr, 2015). The direct victim secures a platform upon which their

concerns, frustrations and pain are heard by all parties in the hope of securing restitution and emotional repair (Bazemore, 1998). Impacted community members engage in the process of rebuilding a sense of safety and accountability by the judicial system and the offender, and the offender acknowledges their accountability and actively engages in the steps necessary to gain acceptance upon reentry, including financial and physical reparations (Bazemore, 1998).

RJ is an expansive term representing a variety of different strategies, including face-to-face restorative justice conferencing (RJC), family group conferencing (FGC), victim offender conferences, victim impact panels, and court-ordered restitution (Sherman et al., 2007; Sherman, Strang, Mayo-Wilson, Woods, & Ariel, 2014). Most commonly used in cases where juveniles are implicated in criminal acts, family members are seen as integral support systems and necessary to the juvenile's desistence in crime, and their involvement is critical in maintaining or restoring the family unit (Connolly, 2006). Less frequently, however, are the family members of adult offenders invited to participate within this process, and RJ outcome studies fail to demonstrate their inclusion, potentially limiting a crucial element to the offender's successful reintegration. While directly impacted victims of crime participate in a process intended to voice grievances and suffering, the absence of offender family members only further removes the family from the restorative possibilities and perpetuates their victimization, an area further reviewed in Chapter 2.

I used the concepts of trauma-informed care and restorative justice to frame my interview questions, and to address the primary research questions and subquestions.



Data were coded, and themes were developed with attention to the importance of each participant's perspective as data were reviewed in the context of the research concepts; however, an abundance of caution was taken to ensure that if themes developed beyond the identified concepts, those were also disclosed, interpreted and discussed.

### **Nature of the Study**

For this study, I utilized a qualitative phenomenological exploration of the human phenomena of victimization and resulting trauma of adult offender family members. The research questions aided the examination of the family members' personal journey from the time of their loved one's arrest, through the many days, weeks, and even years of their absence, and explored their quest for emotional and psychological support, in the anticipation of the offender's return to the family and community. These phenomena impact individuals uniquely, and a shared meaning may begin to develop through their recollection and disclosure of these personal events. Additionally, as the participants reflected upon their individual stories, it helped to illuminate their anticipated roles within the offender's future reentry. For this study, I selected the phenomenological methodology, as it was most appropriate for exploring multiple participants' diverse and personal experiences as a family member of a criminal offender, through the use of probing, open-ended questions, which allowed for a rich and detailed interpretation of the participants' lived events and impressions (Creswell, 2013).

Sampling for this study was purposeful and identified cases that met a broad criteria of adult family members of offenders. I sought a diverse group of participants, specifically within the age range of 18 and older, with different ethnic backgrounds, from

both genders, and the offenders' crimes were classified into four different categories-- property, violent, sexual or drug. Only one member from each family was selected to participate, even if several members volunteered. The importance of gaining insight from such a broad group of possible participants is based on the premise that a mother's perception of victimization and her role in reintegration will differ from that of a sibling's, adult child's or other relative's, and each of their perspectives is unique and important in the understanding of the victimization and reintegration phenomena.

Through this study, I intended to understand the essence, or depth, of each individual's perception of the phenomena, rather than how widespread the phenomena is, which generally requires a sample size to range between seven and twelve participants. This study engaged 13 participants. Each participant received a Consent to Participate form, a \$30 stipend for their audio-recorded, in-person interview, and each was provided a transcript of their interview to allow for feedback and corrections.

Coding and analytical processes began with the first interview and observations. Coding was conducted by hand, as this allowed me to gain a more intimate inspection of the data. I anticipated to replicate this hand-coding process with an appropriate Qualitative Data Analysis Software (QDAS) system, such as NVivo, for its faster and more accurate searching capabilities; however, I discovered the hand-coding process to be insightful, as it provided me multiple opportunities for reading and listening to the data. Once I produced a one- to two-page summary draft of findings, each participant received a copy for their corroboration or additional insights.

## Definitions

Some terms used in this study may be understood by the reader; however, to eliminate any misinterpretation, specific definitions relevant to the context of this study are outlined below.

*Diversity:* Within the context of this study, this applies to the attempt to seek participants of different ages, genders, races, ethnicities and cultural/socioeconomic backgrounds, as well as identifying those, whose incarcerated loved ones have committed different types of criminal acts.

*Emotional trauma:* Damage caused to one's long-term psychological balance, often exhibited through shock, numbness, denial, anger, and difficulties in concentration or sleeping; all which may contribute to chronic physical maladies and overall poor health (Babbel, 2010; López-Martínez, Serrano-Ibáñez, Ruiz-Párraga, Gómez-Pérez, Ramírez-Maestre, & Esteve, 2016; National Center for Victims of Crime. 2012; Prossin, 2016; Salleh, 2008).

*Lived experience:* The reported life experiences of the offender's family member, as seen and expressed from their perspective.

*Offender:* Any individual, male or female, who has been arrested, tried and convicted of an illegal act.

*Offender family:* Any individual, over the age of 18, male or female, who is related to the offender by blood, marriage or state-sanctioned common-law statutes. For this study, the concept of family may extend beyond these traditional concepts or that of a nuclear family; such that, if the individual is not related in the aforementioned capacity,

but the individual and the offender consider one another relationally close, or “family”, and the individual is someone to whom the offender will return, upon release from incarceration. An example of this might include two friends who grew up together and consider each other as close as siblings.

*Reentry:* The act of an offender being released from incarceration and returning to the community. The community to which the individual returns may be the same or different from that which he or she left upon incarceration.

*Reintegration:* The process undertaken by a formerly incarcerated individual, to conform to societal rules and expectations. This includes, but is not limited to securing gainful employment, abstaining from substance use, lawfully obtaining clothing, food, transportation and housing, and ensuring stable support systems.

*Support (Emotional):* The personal sense of receiving love from another, free of criticism and conflict, and the desire to share experiences, ask for advice and seek comfort (Taylor, 2016).

*Support (Instrumental):* This manner of support results in more tangible outcomes, such as financial offerings, provision of food, clothing or shelter, or the assistance with securing substance abuse counseling, employment or transportation (Taylor, 2016).

*Victim:* A person who has been adversely impacted by the commission of a crime by another individual (U.S. Department of Justice, 2014b).

*Direct victim:* In current literature and within the media, a direct victim is the immediate individual who endures the impact of a criminal act (Nash, 2008).

*Indirect victim:* Within the context of this study, the indirect victim is the family member of an incarcerated individual. As per participant selection criteria for this study, an indirect victim cannot simultaneously be a direct victim of the incarcerated individual's criminal act.

### **Assumptions**

Creswell (2013) outlines four philosophical assumptions, upon which qualitative researchers undertake studies, including ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology. This study bears certain assumptions within the interpretive framework of social constructivism; whereby, offender family members have developed their own set of interpretations of their world and experiences after their loved one committed a criminal offense; therefore, as this is a phenomenological study, participants have described their experiences, and as the researcher, I have made interpretations based on the participant responses (Creswell, 2013).

The ontological assumption facing this study is that, as each offender family member is unique, both in personal experiences with the offender and their own worldviews, each study participant faces their own reality with their relationship to the offender, as well as what role they anticipate having upon the offender's release. My expectation and assumption made of the study results is that the participants' unique perspectives are represented (Creswell, 2013). Additionally, some of the participants did not completely identify with the phenomena under review; yet, their reality is also described. In research, alternative views are equally as important in understanding the

broader perspectives within a population, and may actually provide a new direction for future research.

The epistemological assumption is that I learn how the participants understand their perspective of victimization, emotional trauma, and role of reentry, by having conducted in-depth and personal interviews directly with the offender family members (Creswell, 2013). I gained first-hand descriptions of the offender family member's lived experiences by conducting in-person interviews, which created a level of trust and alliance between myself and the participants, a sensation often lost in anonymous survey research. This research assumed that a study containing seven to twelve participants, from different offender families, would adequately produce rich and meaningful descriptions of the phenomena under review. More participants were not added to the study, as the findings produced a depth of experience. Additionally, I offered each participant an opportunity to check their interview transcriptions for accuracy and study findings for endorsement, elaboration or rejection; each step, further ensuring that I achieved insight and understanding of the participants' perspectives (Hathaway, 1995).

As this study's researcher, I brought personal values and experiences into this study; therefore, the qualitative axiological assumption relies on me to acknowledge and report on any personal knowledge of the research phenomena and bias (Creswell, 2013). This assumption is addressed in the Role of the Researcher section in Chapter 3, where I identify the phenomenon of victimization, through personal exposure to criminal behavior, but not that of an offender's family member. I developed and presented interview questions which represent constructs of the phenomena of victimization,

emotional trauma, and the offender family member's role in reentry and reintegration, which afforded study participants the opportunity to assert their own values and perceptions into study findings and interpretations.

This study was inductive; whereby, themes emerged from the collection of participants' insights, the final philosophical assumption of methodology (Creswell, 2013). The methodological assumption of this study was that deeply personal, open-ended research questions would, in fact, guide this study toward a deeper understanding of the phenomena of offender family victimization, emotional trauma and roles of reentry. I made this assumption based on the limited research into this aspect of victimology, as is recounted in Chapter 2.

Finally, within the discussion of understanding offender families as victims, their development of emotional trauma and their perceived roles in reentry and reintegration, lies the assumption that these family members play a vital role in an offender's reintegration. An abundance of research (Naser & La Vigne, 2006; Shapiro & Schwartz, 2001; Taylor, 2016; Visser & Travis, 2011) points to this assertion, but research has failed to explore this in greater depth from the family's perspective. As previously stated, the three-year recidivism rate is approximately 68% (National Institute of Justice, 2014), and assuming the family feels understood and supported by the surrounding community and has the personal strength to support the returning offender, their positive impact may help reduce this rate. This study assumed offender family members' desire to have their opinions and experiences heard as a means of having a share of voice within the larger discussion of victimization and positive reintegration.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

The scope of this research study aimed to explore the lived experiences of offender family members, primarily through gaining insight to their sense of victimization, emotional trauma and how they perceive their roles once the offender returns to the community. While the vast majority of incarcerated individuals are eventually released, many return to family members for both emotional and instrumental support; yet, questions still remain as to how these family members have accepted this expectation and understand their own feelings of loss, sadness, anger and anxiety of the future and their responsibilities within it. While gaining insight into the offender's motivations and mitigating factors of the event might provide a broader picture of the familial context, the specific intention of this study was to focus on how the resulting criminal act effected the family member and how those emotions and experiences impact their perceptions on their willingness and ability to provide the expected support. This study purposefully addressed the gap in existing literature, outlined in Chapter 2, where assumptions are made that incarcerated individuals often expect to return to family members, while the family members' personal pain is silenced and their expectations go largely ignored.

Delimitations for this study arose, but resulted from intent, so as to maintain the scope of the purposeful investigation. This research was conducted in Texas, for the primary reason of my access to approximately seven to twelve individual participants for face-to-face interviews. While travel outside of Texas was possible, the timing and coordination of interviews outside of Texas created excessive hardships, and it was



believed that Texas participants would provide the diversity sought for this study. A further review of this delimitation is discussed below in Issues of Transferability.

An additional delimitation for this study were the research questions (Simon & Goes, 2013). While my primary goal was to understand the sense of victimization and resulting trauma experienced by offender family members, the second goal addressed their role in reentry and reintegration. While broad consensus, on the importance of familial support with reintegration and reduce recidivism persists (Duwe & Clark, 2013; Kendler, Lönn, Sundquist, & Sundquist, 2017; Taylor, 2016), others widely agree upon other factors that play important facets to an individual recidivating in criminal behavior, such as securing gainful employment, desisting from substance use, factors driving self-motivation, an “aging out” (Burkhead, 2006, p. 47) of antisocial behavior, attaining education or vocational training, and the development of healthy and supportive new friendships (Davis, Bahr, & Ward, 2012; Scott, 2016).

### **Participant Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

Due to the nature of increased diversity within the U.S. population, and research supporting increases in heterogeneous neighborhood composition resulting in diverse expansion of criminal behavior (Hansmann & Quigley, 1982; Kubrin, 2000), I considered the importance of studying a diverse set of offender family members as foundational to participant inclusion. Diversity, in this study, included both genders, and multiple ethnic and age categories for the family members, irrespective of the offenders’ diverse credentials. The offender’s criminal record, though not evaluated in this study, was included in the participant screening, as I believed this detail would provide additional

insight to the offender family member's degree of victimization and ability to assist with reintegration.

Exclusion criteria pertained to effective research communication, safety and relevance to study research questions. The participants were required to speak English, as translation could have resulted in misunderstanding and faulty interpretations. The exclusion of a participant with an untreated mental health disorder is considered relevant for the safety of a participant's ongoing mental health; as, study questions surrounding victimization and trauma might have exacerbated severe mental health issues. A family member, whose loved one committed the crime directly against them, or whose loved one is serving a life sentence without the possibility of parole was removed from consideration, as neither advance the study's objectives. Responses to direct victimization were not included in this study's objectives; additionally, if the offender will not be released from incarceration, the family member would not be considering their role in reintegration.

### **Issues of Transferability**

While results of qualitative studies are not intended to generalize to a broader population, in this case, to a nation-wide or even international population of offender family members, the researcher must produce a rich and descriptive narrative of findings, so that readers may transfer any themes and "shared characteristics" (Creswell, 2013, p. 252) of the study participants' revelations to other similar situations or settings. The responsibility of transferability rests with the researcher's ability to fluidly connect participants' thematic descriptions into a concise, yet illuminating account of the

participants' lived experiences that may resonate to others in similar situations. One potential concern for transferability in this study directly connects to the sample population, which resulted in a higher number of female family members' participation, which is discussed in greater depth within the Limitations section below. Additionally, the sample population from Texas will differ from those of other geographic locations; therefore, comparability of samples hinder transferability.

### **Limitations**

#### **Methodological**

Limitations to this study are evident through methodological challenges (Simon & Goes, 2013), including sample recruiting rather than the process for participant selection. Gaining access to offender families is onerous, as they often do not seek public attention, and groups that work with these individuals are understandably protective of their privacy and personal circumstances. I identified a few organizations and representatives agreed to cooperate with the intent of this study's research; however, the dissemination range of recruitment announcements was very narrowly defined. Added to the complexity of locating eligible participants was the fact that many of the potential participants are members within support groups, such as Texas Inmate Families Association (TIFA) and Mothers of Incarcerated Sons Society (MISS). The nature of many of these groups may falsely imply that the family members have adequate social support and coping mechanisms, which may limit the participants' exploration into additional needs for them to ready themselves for the offender's reintegration.

A second limitation to this study was intricately connected to sample recruiting, in that particular individuals are more likely than others to participate in research. Studies have consistently revealed that more whites than non-whites, women more than men, younger more than older, and those with more education and affluence are more likely to participate in research (Smith, 2008; Voigt, Koepsell, & Daling, 2003). I worked closely with identified organizations that would aid in participant recruitment, to ensure a diverse population had access to recruitment efforts, but did not influence one group over another simply to ensure diversification. For example, all ages and genders received equal exposure to recruitment material, and one group did not receive greater compensation or additional incentives for participation over another.

While attempts were made to broaden the definition of *family* within the scope of this study, the term itself may be culturally biased, assuming a nuclear family arrangement. Interested participants, who may be responsible for an offender's reentry and reintegration, may not have identified themselves as the individual's family member by current cultural norms, and therefore may have deselected from the study. The screening interview (Appendix E) and participant selection matrix (Appendix A) were designed to allow for a broader definition of family to offset this study limitation.

### **Biases**

This phenomenological study held particular challenges for bias, including a personal relationship between myself and any research participant, the expectation that all study participants would report victimization, trauma and a perceived role in reintegration, and that evolving themes reflected researcher assumptions. While I have

met and spoken with individuals, who have agreed to assist with participant recruitment, I have requested that those individuals not seek participation in the study, because of my prior knowledge of their experience with the phenomena under review, to which they have agreed.

While most researchers seek supporting evidence to hypotheses or themes to promote research questions, all researchers must accept that some participants will provide contradictory data. While I assumed offender family members experience some level of victimization and resulting emotional trauma, this was, in fact, not the case for some participants. To mitigate the presence of this study bias, I presented all findings, including those which may counter the study's research questions, as even contradictory findings may provide insight beyond the study's initial points of investigation.

I also attempted to address bias through the use of bracketing and identification of personal interpretation in separate notes during the interviews, a method often used to lessen the impact of researcher assumptions and biases within the development of codes and themes (Englander, 2012). Phenomenological research necessitates that the researcher reserve knowledge or personal reality of the phenomenon and allow the participants to define their experiences and subsequent meanings to the phenomenon as they have lived them (Patton, 2015). Therefore, I bracketed personal knowledge and experience of the phenomena under review in the introduction of both Chapters 4 and 5 to clearly differentiate personal knowledge and assumptions from the data collected from participants.

### **Significance**

This unique qualitative exploration sought to advance a broader understanding of and acceptance for the family members of offenders, by championing their voices, not as complicit criminal conspirators, but as individuals who have been hurt, demoralized, and punished, alongside the criminal offender, within the judicial system and the broader community. Advancing a wider acceptance of the term *victim* to include the offender's family members, affords a broader and necessary sense of compassion, implicit in the field of psychology. Additionally, gaining insight into the abilities and expectations of and providing support and tools to offender family members will increase their relevance and importance to reducing recidivism, a necessary component to the field of forensic psychology.

My intended goal of social change for this research is to encourage a larger social dialogue and acceptance for offender families to seek empowerment for the healing that must occur for them to move beyond the role of victim to one of grounded support for the offender upon their return to the community. For these family members to move to this role, they must first identify themselves as being victimized by the offender, and believe that they have the right to be understood and treated as a victim, with access to RJ programs and the same social services already available to victims of crime, as well as services that will further their abilities and awareness at assisting the offender with reintegration. For example, this may include a city's or county's Victim Services department, often housed within the police or sheriff's departments, to provide counseling and after-care services to family members, such as access to social services

addressing anger management, financial preparedness, parenting classes, supportive educational programs or substance abuse treatment and supportive education, such as AL-ANON.

The practical reality of this being only one small aspect on lowering recidivism, is not lost on me, as crime is highly complex and multifactorial, and while social programs for offenders do help minimize recidivism, the offender must ultimately be the one who decides to desist from criminal activity (National Institute of Justice [NIJ], 2014).

Additionally, trauma-informed care and victim services, though to some degree are offered within many community social services, often require additional funding, which may not be an extra operational expense afforded to many families, when legal fees, traveling to visit the offender during incarceration, and the burden of unforeseen childcare or loss of work often precludes individuals from seeking necessary therapeutic care. Furthermore, this research focused on those offenders who either have family or close friends they consider to be family, to whom they will return and seek support; however, I did not focus this research on those offenders, who by their actions have severed familial ties, and do not have family to whom they can return, but who have victimized their families nonetheless.

### **Summary**

Though the national crime rate has declined in recent decades, incarceration rates remain the highest in the world, impacting offenders' families across socioeconomic positions, not only in terms of the realization of the criminal behavior, but throughout the judicial process, amid lingering periods of incarceration and awaiting their loved one's

eventual reentry. These events have created a group of people who feel victimized and remain emotionally traumatized; yet, they process their lifecourse without the benefit of social support and tools to encourage their own healing and personal growth to serve as necessary conduits for the returning offenders' success at community reentry and reintegration.

This phenomenological qualitative study sought to explore the lived experiences of offenders' family members, as they evaluate their sense of victimization and emotional trauma and their perceptions of necessary psychological support and community empathy to effectively perform their anticipated roles in the offender's reentry, following society's goal of reducing recidivism. Their experiences were collected through probing, open-ended and comprehensive research questions, and interpreted within the context of trauma informed care and RJ models. While results are not intended to generalize to larger or demographically unique populations, it is with hope that findings create a wider social dialogue to bringing these victims of crime out of the shadows and into a more productive discussion on the families' importance to reducing recidivism and healing social pain.

Chapter 2 reviews past research and relevant literature on the role of offender families within the context of trauma and restorative justice, further illuminating the gap in the research, one in which this study aims to explore. Additionally, the history of victimology, victim advocacy and victim blaming provides insight to the importance of illuminating the struggles faced by offender families as unrecognized victims within



society and the judicial process. Chapter 3 further defines the methodological processes which guided this study.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

Historical review of all parties impacted by criminal behavior largely continues to focus on the offender and the direct victim of the crime and the families of the offenders receive little attention by researchers other than acknowledging their importance to the offender's well-being and the concession that they also suffer from stigmatization. In this literature review, I sought to elucidate the lack of research evaluating the problem that family members are expected to serve as integral components to an offender's reintegration by both the legal system and the communities into which the offender returns. However, these individuals have often not self-identified as victims, due to the commonly-accepted definition of the term, and they have not received adequate psychological care or support in the roles they will be expected to play in the offender's return, leaving them at risk for further victimization and emotional trauma.

It is because of this problem that I defined the purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study. I wanted to explore the level of victimization and trauma experienced by offender family members, irrespective of the crime committed by the offender, and their perceptions of necessary psychological support and community empathy to effectively perform their anticipated roles in the offender's reentry, in an effort to reduce recidivism. I organized this literature review to address the historical evolution of victimology, victim advocacy, victim blaming and perceived complicity, impact of cumulative trauma, familial involvement with reintegration and recidivism, and demonstrated the gap in the literature for the occupied space of the offender family as a

victim. The conceptual frameworks that I used in this study were trauma-informed theory and restorative justice, and based on the findings, I reported how the family members have suffered emotional trauma and have stated their interest in dynamic engagement within the restorative justice model, as one approach to providing effective reintegration.

### **Description of the Literature Search Strategy**

A computerized keyword search of terms within the Google Scholar, Sage Premier, ProQuest Criminal Justice, PsycINFO and SocINDEX databases produced literature for this review in the form of scholarly, peer-reviewed journals, books, and symposia periodicals. I used the Google search engine for data and information on non-profit and government websites. I used Boolean operators to further define search results, especially when combining terms such as *offender family*, and *victim*, as this procedure greatly reduced redundant or inappropriate search results; however, combining these two specific terms produced limited results. Additionally, I utilized alternative terms, such as *passive victims*, *indirect victims*, and *secondary victims*, discovered in the literature (Ofori-Dua et al., 2015), with limited success, which further demonstrated the paucity of research in this area of victimology.

For this literature review, I also searched terms, such as: *trauma*, *trauma-informed theory*, *restorative justice/outcome*, *victimology*, *victim compensation/restitution*, *victim blaming*, *courtesy stigma*, *family and inmate*, and *family/reintegration*. Once I observed the names of particular authors associated with related topics, I searched for those names specifically, as they related to relevant articles. These included: Gordon Bazemore, John Braithwaite, Ronnie Janoff-Bulman, Jan van Dijk, John Dussich, Rebecca Naser,

Lawrence Sherman, Wesley Skogan, Heather Strang, Caitlin Taylor, Christy Visher and Hans von Hentig.

Date ranges for the literature search began as early as the 1940s, when the term *victimology* gained acceptance, and included years from the 1950s through the early 2000s to incorporate necessary historical events. Research into trauma-informed theory began with research in the 1980s and continued through 2016. Restorative justice research spanned 5 decades beginning in the 1970s, and much of the literature on family involvement with reintegration concentrated in the early part of 2000, with limited sources in the last 5 years.

## **Conceptual Framework**

### **Trauma-Informed Concept**

The victimization and subsequent traumatic reactions, by offender families, to the offender's criminal behavior and the loss of the offender to the criminal justice system, is based in the concept of helping professionals and services being *trauma-informed*. The concept of *trauma-informed* centers around the idea that many individuals face wide-ranging traumatic experiences, and when seeking community support or services, the more that professionals understand about the damage or stress resulting from the trauma, services provided to these victims would be administered in a manner which is sensitive to the trauma the individual endured (Wilson et al., 2013). Much of what is known and understood today about trauma, comes from increased recognition of childhood sexual abuse, incest, violence against women, and trauma experienced by war veterans over the

past century (Herman, 1997), and has expanded to include victims of natural disasters (SAMHSA, 2014).

Offender family members, having experienced loss and emotional suffering, experience trauma resulting

from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and physical, social, emotional or spiritual well-being. (SAMHSA, 2014, p. 7)

However, this distinct group has been excluded from all current academic review and discussion, as it pertains to the concept of trauma-informed theory and care, to which this current study seeks to correct.

Trauma affects people regardless of age, gender, race, ethnicity or socioeconomic position, and impacts individuals at their own distinct levels of vulnerability and marginalization (SAMHSA, 2014). Traumatic reactions may result from natural incidents such as flooding, and human-caused events, such as becoming a victim of criminal activity (National Center for Victims of Crime, 2012; SAMHSA, 2014). Janoff-Bulman (1985) noted that an individual's emotional reaction and behavioral responses to the victimizing event oftentimes persists far longer than the event itself, especially if beneficial coping mechanisms are not developed or employed. This link between victimization and trauma is critical in understanding the impact that an individual's reaction to victimizing events has on their long-term traumatic responses, and the

importance that trauma-informed services and professional treatment has on the individual's well-being (Wilson et al., 2013).

Holstein and Miller (1990) described the identification of victims as an interactional process of society's linguistic and common understanding of an individual's suffering, due to forces beyond their control, and the "interpretive instructions" (p. 106) of how to treat, respond to, and act toward the individual, upon whom the suffering burdens. Whether the suffering results in a person identifying as a victim or the identification is made externally, the responsibility for the victimization remains external to the individual (Holstein & Miller, 1990). Outlined by Frieze, Hymer and Greenberg (1987), victims react to a victimizing event in three progressive and predictable stages: (a) impact-disorganization phase, where the individual responds with denial, generalized numbness and helplessness; (b) recoil phase, where the victim may respond with vacillating feelings of anxiety and anger, and may have feelings of self-pity; and (c) reorganization phase, where the victim reevaluates values and readjusts to their life.

Designating individuals as victims appears relatively straightforward. However, defining and measuring the psychological trauma from victimization is far more complex, as the context in which an individual experiences traumatic loss is individualized and personal, and oftentimes healing from traumatic loss is best accomplished within close relationships, as Stolorow (2015) described from his phenomenological review of the loss of a loved one. When the person from whom emotional support is needed to recover from psychological trauma, is the one missing or removed, this process of healing may result in lasting "emotional numbing" (p. 125). This may be the case for offender families, due

to the loss of a husband, child or sibling from the family structure. Stolorow (2015) postulated that the individual experiencing the psychologically traumatizing event may actually be experiencing cumulative traumas of loss and sadness from earlier childhood experiences, creating pervasive cognitive schemas of “isolation, shame and self-loathing” (p. 126). Drawing upon Stolorow’s hypothesis, research has demonstrated that over half of the female inmates entering incarceration have evidence of past trauma (DeHart, Lynch, Belknap, Dass-Brailsford, & Green, 2014), and one study illuminated that male inmates were three times more likely to have experienced trauma prior to incarceration (Hochstetler, Murphy, & Simons, 2004), leading to the supposition that if the individual’s past trauma had not been appropriately addressed, a cycle of cumulative trauma will continue.

Though trauma-informed theory has traditionally focused on direct victims of crime such as, abused and/or neglected children and victims of war or natural disasters, the concept of trauma has begun to develop more fluid edges, accepting that any individual can have a personal experience with a traumatizing event and their sociocultural environment influences their response and subsequent coping (SAMHSA, 2014). The events themselves can be interpreted differently by those experiencing the event directly, and what remains critical to the exploration of personal identification of trauma is the individual’s response to the event being traumatic, or stress inducing. Many family members have never experienced the loss of a loved one to criminal activity. To help illuminate this loss, Marlow et al. (2015) summarized research that identified offender family members who commonly expressed “pain and anguish as their loved

ones came and went from their lives without warning” (Uncertainty and Worry section, para. 5), as well as a wearing of their physical health, resulting from the persistent anxiety of the inmate’s well-being.

### **Restorative Justice**

The concept of restorative justice (RJ) has played a prominent role in many of the world’s oldest societies’ systems of justice, and is used to heal and restore individual and community trust following discovery of criminal acts, rule violations and behavioral transgressions, especially the act of homicide (Braithwaite, 1998, Gavrielides, 2011; Wenzel et al., 2008). While criminal justice professionals use no agreed upon standard definition of RJ or determination of when society has been restored (Wood, 2015), they share a consensus that an RJ system contains three primary stakeholders: the direct victim, the community and the offender (Bazemore, 1998). The victim has the opportunity to hear case details about which they may be unaware, such as the offender’s motivation. They also secure a platform upon which their concerns, frustrations and pain are heard by all parties; and finally, the victim builds hope of restitution and emotional repair (Bazemore, 1998). Impacted community members engage in the process to rebuild a sense of safety and accountability by the offender, and the offender acknowledges their accountability and actively engages in the steps necessary to gain acceptance upon reentry into society, including financial and physical reparations (Bazemore, 1998).

Though theories and practices of retribution have always played a role in a society’s execution of justice, RJ aims to address the harm done to individuals rather than to the state (Braithwaite, 1998; Gavrielides, 2011). While its origins are challenging to



precisely determine, Braithwaite (1998) argued that social philosophers and anthropologists, researchers, victim advocates and legal experts have participated in the concepts' rise and fall throughout time. During the period of the Norman invasion in 1066, crimes committed were interpreted as being carried out against the state, and individual suffering was of little consequence. Over generations of developing victim advocacy, the 1970's experienced an international social movement for the victim. The Kitchener Experiment of 1974 is thought to be the original victim/offender reconciliation program, aimed at bringing offenders and their victims together to develop reconciliation plans (Peachey, 1989). RJ received its most instrumental endorsement in 1994 by the American Bar Association, which drew national attention at efforts aimed at affecting relationships between the victim (of generally property or minor assaults), the offender, and the community (Armour, 2012); however, programs exist today that include offenders of violent crime, including capital murder (Eschholz, Reed, Beck, & Leonard, 2003).

RJ is an expansive term that encompasses a variety of different strategies, including face-to-face restorative justice conferencing (RJC), family group conferencing (FGC), victim offender conferences, victim impact panels, and court-ordered restitution, with both RJC and court-ordered restitution receiving the preponderance of research evaluation (Sherman et al., 2007; Sherman et al., 2014). FGC originated in New Zealand in 1989, after the passing of the Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act, the aim of which was to engage family members and youth in an RJ process, that served to protect the welfare of children (Maxwell & Morris, 2001) by addressing issues of child

abuse, neglect and minor juvenile offending (Beck, Lewinson, & Kropf, 2015). With its later adoption to the United States, FGC is the predominant RJ program that incorporates family members into the process, focusing “on people’s strengths and capabilities instead of on their problems, it seeks to include their extended social network” (Metze et al., 2015, p. 166; Zehr, 2015). Although the process chiefly addresses child protection and challenging family dysfunction, some emphasis remains on reintegration of youth offenders (Connolly, 2006).

Direct victims initiate RJ interventions. As they self-select to the process, data has demonstrated positive outcomes in victims’ perceived vindication, establishment of restored relationships within the community (Latimer, Dowden, & Muse, 2005), and overall satisfaction with the criminal justice system, as their inclusion within the process had been heightened (Roland, 1989).

The effectiveness of RJ programs in reducing recidivism remains unknown. Sherman et al. (2014) conducted an international meta-analysis on seven RJ programs, including both violent and property and juvenile and adult offenders, and concluded that while the effect size was small, RJ programs produced a modest and cost-effective reduction in recidivism, even among violent and adult offenders, groups commonly thought to benefit little from RJ programs. Others argued, however, that while the United States widely implements RJ programs, prison populations continue to surge; raising the question of the utility of such programs beyond the micro-level goal of repairing individual-level hurt and damage, as the macro-level goal of instituting philosophical change within judicial system practices appears to fail (Wood, 2015).

Little research has evaluated the impact upon offender family members and their involvement with adult family offenders within an RJ program. Nonetheless, case studies which reviewed outcomes of (direct) victim-offender RJ interactions, illuminated profound demonstrations of closure and healing for the victims, through the offender's answered questions, clarified assumptions, shared perspectives of each other's emotional struggles and retelling of unknown case facts (Beck et al., 2015). Direct victims asked why the offender committed the crime, what events had occurred prior to and following the event, and sought statements of empathy through their expression of grief, anger, confusion, loss and family restructuring (Beck et al., 2015), similar elements of trauma experienced by the offender family; yet, their exclusion from the RJ process discounts their level of victimization. Eschholz et al. (2003), however, explored the need to include 19 offender family members, whose loved one had committed a capital offense and was facing death, within an RJ process. These offender family members expressed tremendous grief and anxiety of the impending loss of their loved one by the State, and the researchers concluded that the inclusion of offender family members within an RJ framework would provide tremendous support for community healing, through shared experiences of suffering in order to rebuild and reconnect community members (Eschholz et al., 2003).

Both Bazemore (1998) and Braithwaite (1998, 1989) advocated the importance and value of including those with whom both the victim and offender "has close ties" (Cohen, 2016, p. 261), who oftentimes are family members and can serve as support systems; however, these individuals are most often included in the larger collection of

aggrieved community members when addressed in the literature (Cohen, 2016). Within the RJ process, the community members are asked to participate in creating a shared narrative, evaluating the story of harm caused by the offender and pain and suffering enacted upon the direct victim, and seeking a collective story aimed at benefitting all three pillars in the process (Cohen, 2016). Within this structure, however, offender family members are afforded little opportunity to have their pain and suffering individually and uniquely acknowledged; but rather, their victimization and trauma is seen as the collective state.

Offender family members would benefit greatly within the RJ process, if their perception of victimization were raised to a level of greater importance within the community whole, especially as these individuals are looked upon as being responsible for the offender's reintegration (Taylor, 2016). Evidence has demonstrated convincing arguments that RJ programs help to reduce rearrest rates, both for adult and juvenile offenders, as well as a reduction in court and incarceration costs (Bouffard, Cooper, & Bergseth, 2016; Strang et al., 2013). With the inclusion of offender family members participating on a larger scale, it is foreseeable that recidivism rates would be even more positively impacted.

## **Literature Review**

### **Historical Background**

**Victimology.** Tracing the origin of both the terms *victim* and the scientific study of victimization, *victimology*, is a bit circuitous, as their history is as ancient as the human race, and no one person or civilization can be credited for identifying the concepts.

Though many ancient civilizations recognized the victim, (*victima* in Latin), either a person or animal, as something offered in sacrifice to a deity, van Dijk (2009) argued that the adaptation of this Latin term by Western cultures offers no respect or little hope of recovery to those who have been harmed, and places the perpetrator of the behavior in the position of one who performed the act for the approval of a higher power; thus, emboldening the perpetrator and not the victim. While the linguistic source of the victim may appear helpless and minimized, legal historians have identified distinctive eras where the role of the victim has played an important role within judicial proceedings.

The *Golden Age* of the victim has its roots traced to ancient Mesopotamia, when tribal law dominated, and continues to this day in many rural cultures, and victims played a direct role in distributing punishment to those who committed wrongs against them (Kirchhoff, 2006); however, this system of victim justice was unsustainable, as the alleged perpetrator received no fair balance in the proceedings (Ferguson & Turvey, 2009). This period thus ushered in the next chapter, the *Dark Age* of victimology; with the emergence of criminal justice systems, and increased power with the Church, crimes were thought to be committed against the state rather than individuals, and attention to the victim was all but forgotten (Ferguson & Turvey, 2009). The 1950s and 60s saw the “Reemergence of the Victim” (Ferguson & Turvey, 2009, p. 10), a period of time when, mostly Western cultures had witnessed the deterioration of victims’ rights, scholars began to introduce victimology in university curricula, and the California Victim Compensation program, the Nation’s first program of its kind, was enacted in California in 1965 (Dussich, 2003).

A historical search for the origin of the term *victimology* placed it in the 1947 journal of Benjamin Mendelsohn, an Israeli criminal law scholar who studied the correlations between rape victims and their perpetrators (Dussich, 2003; van Dijk, 1999); wherein, he not only evaluated victims of criminal behavior, but those who would later fall into the category of general victimology, to include individuals affected by traffic accidents, natural disasters, and genocide (Dussich, 2003). Van Dijk (1999) postulated that two primary types of victimology exists: general and interactional (penal); with general victimologists attending to the treatment, prevention and consequences faced by victims of general misfortune and suffering, such as through war or natural disasters, and interactional victimologists concentrating on the victim of criminal behavior and their interaction with the cause of the crime, their subsequent loss, pain, and/or suffering, and their role within the criminal justice system. The 1950's through the 1980's produced criminologists and academicians across the United States, who researched, advocated and lectured on demanding respect and compensation for the victim within the penal system (Dussich, 2003), based on growing literature of international policies on victim restitution (Schafer, 1968).

1966 saw the first standardized effort of collecting victim data, with the Census Bureau collecting the largest database ever in 1972, in which crimes not reported to the police were of special interest; however, the majority of the survey collection focused on six primary offenses: rape, robbery, assault, burglary, larceny and auto theft (Skogan, 1976). Additionally, the survey sought to understand the expenses associated with the offenses and the victim's attitudinal perceptions of the offender and their fear of further

victimization (Skogan, 1976). Other celebrated victim researchers collected extensive data on victims' fear of crime, both in the anticipation of danger and physical harm and the anxiety of property loss (Garofalo, 1981) and they sought to evaluate the relationships between the victim of the crime and the perpetrator, as well as any personal characteristics the victim may have that places them at greater risk of becoming a victim (Hindelang, Gottfredson, & Garofalo, 1978).

Key measures of the current Crime Victimization Survey include personal and property crimes, but does not include fatal crimes, as this is a self-report survey (U.S. Department of Justice, 2014a), as perpetrated upon an individual. Additionally, the primary aim of this data is

- (1) to develop detailed information about the victims and consequences of crime,
- (2) to estimate the number and types of crimes not reported to the police, (3) to provide uniform measures of selected types of crimes, and (4) to permit year-to-year comparisons. (U.S. Department of Justice, 2014a, p. 1)

As highlighted in the scope of the survey findings, established legal terminology for understanding who the victim is – “the recipient of a criminal act” (U.S. Department of Justice, 2014b), and the impact made to that individual, allows little room for considering any other individual impacted by the criminal act, including those not experiencing the act directly, such as family members of the offender. From a social relations perspective, however, Holstein and Miller (1990) argued a more common sense approach would recognize a victim as anyone “unjustly harmed or damaged by exogenous forces beyond their control” (p. 105).

More recently, secondary victimization has entered into victimology vernacular, understood as those individuals experiencing traumatic impact from witnessing trauma and emergency situations on a routine basis, such as first responders, or the family and loved ones of those who have been harmed by criminal behavior (Karmen, 2012; Lundström, 2016). Ofori-Dua et al. (2015) also recently introduced the term *passive victims* in a study aimed at evaluating the consequences of family member incarceration, where the researchers developed a perhaps unjust perspective on the helplessness of offender family members in Ghana, identifying consequences such as social stigma, financial loss and family deterioration. Van Dijk (2009) argued that the term *passive*, when identifying victims, does little to support the role the individual has in their personal suffering, and promotes a level of maintained helplessness. What is noticeably absent in decades-long collection of victim data, including the most recent inclusion of *secondary victims* within methodological collection strategies and the researchers' evaluations, is the experience of the offender's family, and their relative fear or anxiety over the losses they experience and their resulting traumatic reactions, as well as a collective term to adequately identify this group of individuals unjustly harmed by forces beyond their control (Holstein & Miller, 1990).

Finally, Frieze, Hymer, and Greenberg (1987) outlined three stages of victimization to include one's reaction to an event (impact-disorganization), taking an individual from the immediate shock or disbelief through denial, disbelief and helplessness, followed by potentially months-long recoil, where the individual experiences volatility of emotions from fear to anger to sadness and guilt, and generally



concluding with long-term positive coping skills. There is little reason to deny that the description of victimization stages could not also apply to the offender family, without reducing the impact of harm committed to the direct victim of the criminal act. However, as the offender family is not incorporated into the broader social lexicon of victimology, these indirect victims lack responsive community resources and open recognition of their needs (Condry, 2007).

**Victim Advocacy.** While the interest in the scientific study of victims, as a crucial element in understanding criminal behavior, percolated for decades, the acknowledgement of victims' rights for their pain and suffering lagged behind. However, as collective social forces began to observe and validate the impact of both general victimization, as recognized in Vietnam-era war veterans and post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms, the start of the Nation's greatest crime wave in the mid-1960's (Young & Stein, 2004), and the rise of women's rights and the growing intolerance of criminal violence against women in the 1960's and 70's feminist movement, the rise of victim advocacy took hold across the United States and throughout other parts of the world (Dussich, 2003). Results of the nation's first criminal victimization surveys demonstrated a sharp contrast between law enforcement data and victim reporting, illuminating a deeper divide between the public and its trust of the judicial system (Young & Stein, 2004).

The earliest efforts at victim compensation were initiated by penal reform efforts in New Zealand and Great Britain by Margery Fry in the early 1960's, with the United States quickly following suit in 1965, in an attempt to assist those in most need of

financial assistance following a criminal act (Young & Stein, 2004). Additionally, compensating victims helped to ensure their cooperation with criminal investigations; which, until the advent of compensation, suspicion of the judicial system and poor crime reporting hampered law enforcement efforts (Young & Stein, 2004). Throughout the 1970's, 80's, and 90's, scores of victim advocacy legislation were enacted, all with the goal of bringing needed attention to victims of particular crimes and shoring up coffers for victim awareness and compensation, such as: Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (1974), Victim and Witness Protection Act (1982), Victims of Crime Act (1984), Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (1984), Drunk Driving Prevention Act (1988), Victim's Rights and Restitution Act (1990), Mandatory Victims' Restitution Act (1994), and Justice for All Act (2004), just to name a few (Dussich, 2003; U.S. Department of Justice, 2013).

Laws such as these helped provide direct victims of crime necessary protections for lost wages, lost or damaged property, loss of emotional and psychological support during the criminal proceedings, and even against threats or intimidation (Roland, 1989). Roland (1989) also outlined presidential attempts to strengthen the sixth amendment to "guarantee victims the right to be present and to be heard at all critical stages of [criminal] judicial proceedings" (p. 37), and though this effort failed on numerous occasions, the endeavor demonstrated a watershed moment for the national support for victims' rights. These federal efforts, after several states amended their own constitutions to broaden victims' rights (Roland, 1989), finally came to fruition in the 106<sup>th</sup> Congressional session in 1999, when the federal government granted special provisions

for the victims of violent crime, most notably access to all public proceedings, notice of the offender's parole, pardon, release or escape, and order of restitution by the offender (S. J. Res. 3, 106, 1999).

Barnett (1977) argued that as the Nation questioned its political and social directive of offender punishment as a means of keeping an offender from committing additional offenses, rehabilitating the offender, or to deter others from committing criminal behavior, criminal restitution and state-mandated compensation began as an effort to engage the victim with the judicial process and to not simply receive redress for their losses. Court-ordered restitution also offered a sense of accountability by the convicted offender, defined by Barnett (1977) as a means of "making good" (p. 287) on the harm committed to an individual through their criminal behavior, a practice which has gained increasing dominance within the juvenile justice system, where the juvenile commits to exact repayment to the victim or equitable community service (Schneider & Warner, 2015). In 2001, Texas boasted inmate restitution of \$4.5 million toward victims of crime, \$600,000 in community service restitution, and a rearrest rate of only 21.3% for those offenders placed in restitution centers over serving time in prison (Levin, 2005), compared to the average 40.0% recidivism rate by the second year after prison release (*Statewide Criminal Justice*, 2011). Subsequent research, however, provided conflicting results on the overall effectiveness of recidivism rates on those offenders mandated to pay restitution (Piquero & Jennings, 2016; Schneider, 1986).

Both legislation and judicial proceedings have remained consistent in the definition of victimization, making clear the orders for restitution and compensation to be

distributed to direct victims of crime, and in most cases, secondary victims, defined as family members of the victim (Colorado Crime Victim Compensation, 2016; Montana Department of Justice, 2016; Texas Attorney General, 2016; Wickert, 2016). Within those parameters, offender family members have been clearly omitted from the victim advocacy conversation.

In the late 1990's, Jacques Faget recognized "the harmful effects of incarceration and punishment, the rediscovery of the victim, and the need to restore a ruptured community and crumbling traditional institutions" (Van Camp & Wemmers, 2013); thereby, prompting the increased practice of RJ programs, aimed at benefiting a broader range of constituents, but primarily to assist the victim. "A fully restorative system would be characterized by both restorative processes and outcomes" (*Statewide Criminal Justice*, 2011, p. 8), specifically including a process for encouraging dialogue between the direct victim and the offender, and an outcome measure for victim restitution. The Victim Offender Mediation/Dialogue program, a nationally recognized RJ program, with its origination in Texas, completed 187 mediations in 2004, with a 97% satisfaction rate from direct victim and offender participants (*Statewide Criminal Justice*, 2011). Additionally, the Texas-based Bridges to Life RJ program, works with direct victims and offenders who face release date within 12 months of their participation in the 12-week program, and reported a recidivism rate of only 12.7% in 2005 (*Statewide Criminal Justice*, 2011). While the satisfaction and recidivism rates have shown promise, the offender family member, a key stakeholder to the success of the offender's rejection of

criminal reoffending, is seldom recognized within the RJ process, except as ancillary community participants (Cohen, 2016).

### **Complicity, Victim Blaming and Courtesy Stigma**

Hans von Hentig (1940) postulated that if one can be born to become a criminal, then one can also be born to become a victim, and the victim is oftentimes complicit in the criminal act. As outlined earlier, legal mechanics have attempted to preserve the strictest of definitions of criminal behavior to the individuals involved in an offender/victim relationship; namely, the offender who committed the crime, and the direct victim, upon whom the criminal act was performed (Schultz, 1968; U.S. Department of Justice, 2014b). Thankfully, the 1980's ushered in a new understanding of victimization, raising the awareness to the emotional, financial and physical toll placed upon victims of crime; thereby, advancing a sense of empathy for the individual, and also the recognition that the victim would experience a level of trauma-induced stress (Janoff-Bulman, 1985), opening the possibility to include offender family members into the broader lexicon.

Embracing the expanded characterization of the victim, therefore, should obviate their complicity in the criminal behavior; yet, victims continue to endure hostile and prejudicial attitudes surrounding their presumed involvement and complicity with the criminal behavior, due in no small part to politically conservative ideology and the moral values by which individuals perceive the victim's interaction with the criminal behavior (Niemi & Young, 2016). For example, after the highly publicized Columbine and Sandy Hook Elementary School shootings, many individuals blamed the offenders' mothers for

neglecting their role as an involved parent, as they were working mothers; thereby, implying their criminal complicity, and challenging the moral perceptions and expectations of women's roles in society (Melendez et al., 2016).

Though the logic of a victim's complicity in the criminal behavior is arguable, this line of thinking leads some to then believe that the victim should also be blamed for the criminal act. Lerner (1965, 1980) conceptualized one's ability to adapt and manage personal long-term goals, including the avoidance of fearful or painful events (such as a criminal event) and the acquisition of pleasure, all within the confines of a predictable environment, as living within a *just world*; and those, to whom misfortune befalls "get what they deserve" (Lerner & Miller, 1978, p. 1030). Should an individual confront an event that falls outside of the *just world* paradigm, others consequently experience distress that the environment is suddenly unstable and unpredictable; therefore, to quell this uneasiness, and recalibrate back to the *just world*, the individual is held responsible for their misfortune, resulting in victim blaming (Harber et al., 2015). Coined by William Ryan in 1971, *victim blaming* has its conceptual roots as far back as the Old Testament, but was first used to define the rationalized oppression of African Americans, as though their social and economic status was their own fault (Schoellkopf, 2012). The term has since become ubiquitous with victim advocates, especially those working with individuals who have been criminally victimized (Furnham, 2003).

Victim blaming, therefore, naturally envelops the victim in stigma. Courtesy stigma, advanced from Goffman's 1963 definition of moral stigma, as the level of moral and social disgrace placed upon an individual in a relationship with another who has

“blemishes of individual character” (Goffman, 2009, p. 4), often befalls offender family members, as their relationship commits them to the offender’s public disgrace and discredited status, along with blame for the criminal offense. Most notably and recently, the mothers of the notorious Columbine High School (Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris) and Sandy Hook Elementary (Adam Lanza) mass murderers, received 42.3% and 57.7% respectively, of the public blame for the offenders’ behavior, the highest category of *fault* coded in the study (Melendez et al., 2016). Limited attention has been afforded the offender family and their courtesy stigma; its most in-depth exposure coming from the ethnographic study by Rachel Condry, *Families Shamed*, in 2007, where 32 relatives of serious offenders revealed their exposure to public blame for their loved ones’ criminal behavior.

Criminal activity and association with the judicial system spoils the character (Goffman, 2009) of the individual offender, with societal attitudes ranging from unethical to dangerous; thus, spoiling the integrity of those associated with the offender, namely family, and tragically, children of the incarcerated (Luther, 2016). Management of the courtesy stigma becomes a critical component of the individual’s coping mechanism in living with the fact that a loved one is or has been incarcerated. Luther’s (2016) research drew examples from adult children of incarcerated parents who managed their courtesy stigma by choosing to not discuss the parent’s absence, kept to themselves, or physically and emotionally separated from the parents, even going so far as to legally change their names. Condry’s (2007) participants fared poorly in limiting their familial relation to the offender; oftentimes, due to the severity of the crime, media coverage exposed their

desired anonymity, and when distancing themselves was within their control, they languished over the degree to which they revealed details or even to whom, oftentimes citing the need to lie in order to not face rejection or be discredited, especially when it came to employment situations. Other strategies included avoiding the development of new friendships, joining support groups to develop a “collective narrative” (p. 88) and the construction of stories that reframed the criminal account in a less damaging light (Condry, 2007). The techniques were utilized by individuals who would not be responsible for the offender’s reintegration, and research remains necessary to determine if these techniques are useful for the family member willing to provide reintegrative support.

### **Impact of Cumulative Trauma**

Identified in 1963 by Kahn, *cumulative traumas* begin in childhood and have the underpinnings of both discrete and traumatic events (Stolorow, 2015), and though they may begin in childhood, certainly do not abate throughout adulthood, as additional adversities continue to increase the likelihood of adult depression, new and increased drug and alcohol use, reduced physical activity, obesity, and serious and chronic health-related conditions, such as heart, lung and liver disease as well as some cancers (Felitti et al., 1998; Myers et al., 2015; Sinclair, Wallston, & Strachan, 2016). While cumulative traumas disproportionately impact those in lower socioeconomic categories, and those marginalized by race, ethnicity and sex (Myers et al., 2015), epidemiological studies confirmed an increasingly broad spectrum of adults experiencing the negative impact of cumulative trauma, with very few of these individuals seeking treatment (Kessler, 2000).



While effective coping skills and resiliency, “the process of effectively negotiating, adapting to, or managing significant sources of stress or trauma” (Windle, 2011, p. 152), can moderate the emotional impact of individualized cumulative trauma and reduce the mental health sequela of depression (Sinclair et al., 2016), victims who have sustained marginalization from their community oftentimes do not receive the necessary support to develop appropriate coping mechanisms (Condry, 2007). Ofori-Dua et al., (2015) outlined coping mechanisms of the participants from the Ghana prison study; whereby, many turned to drug and alcohol use; and as a means of comforting the loss of a marital spouse, several of the married partners admitted to infidelity, furthering their emotional loss and enduring trauma, when the event led to divorce. Additionally, several of the women, in need of housing after the loss of financial support of the primary earner, were coerced into sexual relationships for shelter and protection, and if the women rejected the offer, they were left homeless (Ofori-Dua et al., 2015), creating risk for additional trauma. However, Ofori-Dua et al., (2015) discovered that not all coping mechanisms by the participants were negative, as some of the adult female participants, perceiving the ostracism from their immediate community, sought hope and acceptance from newly-found religion and support from spiritual leaders, finding their “religious and spiritual beliefs [were] important sources of strength” (p. 194).

### **Familial Involvement with Reintegration**

While the national correctional population has decreased since 2008, and the number of individuals receiving community supervision and parole have also proportionately declined (Bureau of Justice Statistics, n.d.), approximately 95% of all

incarcerated individuals will eventually be released back into communities, most of whom are male, ethnic minorities, poorly educated, and suffer from substance use concerns (Council of State Governments, 2016; Petersilia, 2005), and while the data ranges from four to eleven percent of those released from incarceration return to their prior state of homelessness, the majority of individuals return to family (Western, Braga, Davis, & Sirois, 2015). Shollenberger's (2009) study of inmates returning to the Houston, Texas area reported that male inmates more often returned to parents and intimate partners, while women returned to children or grandchildren. Approximately 54% of these family members reported an optimistic outlook on their relationship with the inmate, at the time of the individual's return; however, a previous review of the families' coping during incarceration, as well as long-term follow-up after continued support (especially financial and emotional) failed to illuminate family pain and conflict (Shollenberger, 2009).

Community reintegration after incarceration is highly complex, involving multiple factors, that if not addressed or supported can quickly place the offender at risk for criminal recidivism, such as finding treatment for substance use, initiating a course for education, securing adequate employment, and ensuring committed family and friends for support (Davis, Bahr, & Ward, 2012; Visser & Travis, 2011). Reintegration places additional hardships on released offenders and their family members if the offender committed a sexual crime and must adhere to sex offender registration and notification (SORN) laws, especially as they relate to housing restrictions (Levenson & Tewksbury, 2009). Though the importance of family in an offender's reintegration has been cited

throughout the literature over the past three decades, even emphatically stating that these family members “play a key role in the success of prisoner reentry” (Datchi, Barretti, & Thompson, 2016, p. 93), the perspective of the dynamics and challenges involved in that process has tended to favor the offender (Davis et al., 2012; Hairston, 1991; Naser & La Vigne, 2006; Taylor, 2016; Visser & Travis, 2011). Consistently, those family members who were able to maintain some form of contact during the inmates’ incarceration maintained more realistic expectations of the inmates’ return; however, blood relatives were far less likely to visit the inmate than intimate partners, stating that distance, cost and logistics created barriers (Naser & Visser, 2006).

McKay, Comfort, Lindquist, and Bir (2016) outlined specific policy recommendations aimed at reducing barriers to family inclusion in reentry planning, including the reduction of telephone fees for inmates, programs aimed at letter-writing, the creation of child-friendly and more welcoming visitation rooms, and most importantly, the initial incarceration or relocation of inmates closer to family to facilitate visitation. Ironically, the inmates’ perspective on what would help with their reentry plan has facilitated much of this policy development (McKay et al., 2016); yet, research has done little to understand the families who do not or cannot engage with the reentry process. Marlow et al. (2015) discovered, upon engaging family members directly in the research outcomes, that families tended to operate under three perspectives of engagement with the returning offender: (a) as coaches who taught life skills, offered appropriate criticism for negative behavior, suggested alternative steps in problem solving, and provided emotional support, (b) supportive of the offender’s role

transformation from an estranged family member to an engaged participant, and (c) anxious and uncertain, which impacted the family member's physical and emotional health. These researchers noted that further research with this third group of family members may help with understanding the "deeply ingrained feelings of uncertainty and worry and teach family members and their loved ones how to cope more effectively with the pain of incarceration and challenges of incarceration" (Marlow et al., 2015, p. 130).

Some families have witnessed countless instances of relapse, can no longer financially support their loved one, recognized their own inability to care for those with mental illness or have experienced continued victimization from the individual, in the case of domestic violence (Shapiro & Schwartz, 2001). The most common stressor upon families of returning inmates was their return to prior behaviors, especially related to substance use and reengaging with friends, who participated in criminal behavior, placing their returning family member at risk for parole violations or rearrest (Naser & Visser, 2006; Western et al., 2015). Just as the offenders were a homogenous group, so too were the families to whom they returned in the Returning Home Project (Shollenberger, 2009). Researchers discovered that 30% of the 427 family members had experienced at least two instances of a loved one serving time in either state or federal penal facilities, and 36% of the participants had also experienced their own incarceration, placing them at a distinct advantage for understanding the challenges facing inmates upon reentry (Shollenberger, 2009). This study, however, failed to capture the emotional suffering and distinct supportive needs the family members required in order to best serve as long-term support systems for the returning inmate.

Studies predominantly focused on the released offender's perspective on their relative success at reentry, capturing recidivism rates, length of employment, abstinence from substance use and securing stable relationships, such as cohabitation or marriage (Bahr, Harris, Fisher, & Armstrong, 2010; Davis et al., 2012). Results consistently concluded that those individuals with a supportive family system performed better over the course of the data collection period (Bahr et al., 2010; Davis et al., 2012). Taylor (2016) further distinguished the type of support that was most significant in reducing reoffending behavior into two categories: (a) emotional support, which was described, from the offenders' perspective, as feelings of closeness, levels of desired involvement, preferred communication and sensitivity to criticism, and (b) instrumental support, which was measured by the active involvement by the family member on assisting the individual with finding employment, providing transportation or housing, guiding them with the process of substance abuse rehabilitation, or offering financial assistance. Emotional support was significantly associated with the reduction of reoffending behavior, over instrumental support (Taylor, 2016); however, these results came with the limitation of not establishing the past burdens or the short- or long-term strain on the individuals providing the emotional support.

The Boston Reentry Study, an instrumental longitudinal study of 122 male and female Massachusetts inmates, began in 2012 and sought to evaluate the adjustments and coping mechanisms employed by these individuals upon reentry (Western et al., 2015). Approximately 40% of the participants returned to live with family members; however, after one week upon reentry, their "high level of initial family contact declined" (Western

et al., 2015, p. 14), and family support continued to decline by 50% over the next six months, revealing unanswered questions as to why the family discontinued support, further illustrating the lack of research into the families' experiences and perceptions of the reentry process. Furthermore, the Second Chance Act Adult Offender Reentry Demonstration Programs, a multisite program review, recognized the need and importance for families to have pre-reentry contact with inmates to better ensure relationship issues were addressed; however, the reviewers noted severe gaps in implementation of this service need, and also failed to present any findings from the families' perspectives of their needs for effective reentry (Lindquist, Willison, Rossman, & Hardison, 2015).

### **Summary and Conclusion**

This review of the literature sought to discover past research on the inclusion of offender family members within the broader discussion of understanding their historical place within victimology and victim advocacy, specifically in terms of acknowledging their victimization and resulting trauma and advocating for their place within the offender's reintegration process. What resulted, amounted to vast research on the offenders' perception of their needs during and after incarceration and decades-worth of characterizing the direct victim of criminal behavior and detailing their earned empathy and psychological support within the community and judicial system. This conclusion, in no way, seeks to minimize the pain and suffering endured by direct victims of crime; it simply supports the assertion made in Chapter 1 that a gap exists in the current research,

defining aspects of emotional trauma through the victimization experienced by offender family members as indirect victims of criminal behavior by their loved ones.

Where the direct victims and offender family members shared a common place within the literature was in the review of complicity, blaming and attached stigma to the crime. In these categories, however, the direct victim of the crime fared better throughout the research, especially as the direct victim has benefitted through increasing involvement as the prominent stakeholder within RJ programs. The offender family member, when incorporated within a broader RJ program, was considered only a part of the larger aggrieved community, and not a primary stakeholder, critical to the offender's reentry. An RJ program is only one aspect, potentially available to indirect victims for emotional healing, but as this social justice program has gained prominence within the criminal justice system, their inclusion demands consideration.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodological considerations for addressing the gap in the literature of offender families identifying themselves as victims and experiencing traumatic outcomes. Research questions and subquestions seek to draw out and explore the lived experiences of offender families throughout the entire process, from the moment of arrest to the point of understanding their needs in preparation for the eventual return of their loved one. I also address ethical considerations and issues of trustworthiness.

## Chapter 3: Research Method

### **Introduction**

The United States has world's largest incarceration rates, with over two million individuals serving time in fragmented systems across the country (Wagner & Rabuy, 2016); however, these figures do not reflect the millions of broken homes and devastation caused to families due to the loss of loved ones, convicted of and serving time for criminal offenses. These families are left without providers, caretakers, partners, and loved ones; yet, the remaining family members are responsible for life's obligations that remain once their family member is incarcerated. Although over 600,000 people are released from incarceration every year (Wagner & Rabuy, 2016), little attention is paid to the families left holding life together in their absence.

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to explore the level of victimization and emotional trauma experienced by offender family members, irrespective of the type of crime committed by the offender. I sought to examine their perceptions of necessary psychological support and community empathy to effectively perform their anticipated roles in the offender's reentry, in an effort to reduce recidivism.

In Chapter 2, I explored existing literature related to the historical evolution of victimology, victim advocacy, victim blaming and perceived complicity, as well as the impact of cumulative trauma, and familial involvement with reintegration and recidivism, exposing a demonstrative gap in the literature for the consideration of the offender family as a victim. In this chapter, I outline the research methodology I chose to address the research questions of offender family victimization, resulting trauma and their perceived



roles in offender reintegration. This chapter also includes participant selection, ethical considerations and issues of trustworthiness.

## **Research Design and Rationale**

### **Research Questions**

This research was driven by two central questions, with each supported by related subquestions, aimed at understanding the lived experience of offender family members and the phenomena of emotional trauma through their victimization and their anticipated role in reintegration.

Research Question 1: What is the personal meaning of victimization and resulting emotional trauma, as experienced by offender family members, resulting from the offender's crime?

Subquestion 1: What emotions do offender family members experience after their loved one is arrested and throughout the trial and sentencing process?

Subquestion 2: What physical reactions do offender family members experience throughout the entire legal process?

Subquestion 3: How has the experience of becoming an offender family member affected relationships with friends/neighbors/other family members/larger community?

Subquestion 4: How do offender family members psychologically cope with the absence of their loved one?

Research Question 2: How do offender family members identify their roles in the offender's reentry and reintegration process?

Subquestion 1: What specific roles do offender family members anticipate having once their loved one reenters the community?

Subquestion 2: What sources of support do offender families require to fulfill their anticipated roles?

Through this phenomenological study, I sought to find meaning in the lived experiences of offender family members, both in their lives directly after the discovery of their loved one's offense and the span of time, waiting in anticipation of their loved one's return. I also sought to discover the source of their personal meaning of these experiences, brought about through personal insight and reflection (van Manen, 2016). The phenomena of victimization and resulting emotional trauma impacts individuals uniquely, and meaning will begin to develop through their distinctive considerations of these personal events. Additionally, I intended to demonstrate that as participants reflected upon their individual stories, it would help them evaluate their anticipated roles within the offender's future reentry.

I chose the qualitative methodology with a phenomenological design for this study. Moustakas (1994) stated that the foundation of this methodology is to describe the "essence" (p. 21) of the participants' experiences in concrete and understandable themes, and not to provide "explanations or analyses" (p. 21). The phenomenological method was the most appropriate method for exploring multiple participants' diverse and personal search into their experience as a family member of a criminal offender, as it afforded me the opportunity to ask deeply probing interview questions to a substantial but manageable participant pool of 13 participants (Creswell, 2013).

### **Role of the Researcher**

My role as the researcher in this phenomenological study was that of complete participation throughout the interview and observational process with each participant, engaging fully while guiding the interview progression without providing suggestive responses. Throughout the course of the interview, I took field notes and audio-recorded each participant interaction. As Creswell (2009) suggests, taking notes of each participant's behavior during a study provides a comprehensive evaluation of activities conducted during the interview that can be compared with recordings and can be cross-referenced once all data are collected, a process known as triangulation. Though not a required element of the study, participants may provide qualitative collateral about their loved one. When participants provided this additional information, I took notes about the information and the participants' subsequent reactions.

One challenge facing researchers in phenomenological studies is the need to bracket personal experiences and assumptions about the phenomena from the interpretation of the data, as these experiences may create interpretation borne of the researcher's impressions and not that of the participants' (Creswell, 2013). Patton (2015) recommends that the researcher document any personal experience and understanding of the phenomena. While I do have personal experience with being a direct victim of both property and violent crime, the phenomenon under review is formed from the perceptions of family members of the offenders, not of direct victims. To extend the knowledge and impact of personal crime to the perspective of being a family member, whose loved one has committed a crime, is not only highly presumptive but grievously erroneous. During

each interview, as I encountered moments of personal interpretation or bias, based on assumptions, I made comments in a separate section of the field notes, isolated from the participant's comments and reflections, with the intent of maintaining focus on the participant's introspection. My past experiences and knowledge of criminal behavior, as well as identification of any resulting bias throughout the interview process, will be clearly described in Chapter 5 so as to establish efforts of bracketing.

Qualitative researchers must also identify any personal or professional relationship with any participant, as this affiliation may pose a threat of a power differential between the participant and the researcher. This prior connection may unduly provide the researcher with pre-study subject matter knowledge, affording the impression of biased data material. I do not have any prior relationship with any known members of the intended sample population. However, I have met with board members of the potential sample population, as a means of study introduction and permissions, and have expressly communicated that anyone, with whom I met, will be ineligible for the study. Additionally, only those participants who fit the criteria for selection were considered, irrespective of their personal interest or desire to participate in the study.

One additional area of potential ethical concern was the decision I made to provide a \$30 stipend per participant. Often seen as "unduly influencing" (Grady, 2005, p. 1681) participation and potentially "coercive" (p. 1681), and subsequently placing the participant at disproportionate risk, researchers often face criticism for this practice, especially when children are included in the participant pool. For these reasons, this research did not include the participation of anyone under the age of 18 years old. A \$30

stipend offers the participant a modest sum for their time spent in the interview process (approximately two hours per participant), time that may otherwise be spent at work, with family, or on other obligations. Participants were sent their individual, transcribed data and the study's summarized provisional findings, either through the postal service or via email, whichever they requested, and were asked to review the documents, adding to their time spent in the research process. Promotional material for participant recruitment stated the \$30 stipend.

## **Methodology**

### **Participant Selection**

My theoretical target population for this study included all adult family members, whose loved one is currently incarcerated for an offense in the United States; however, accessing this target population was not only cost-prohibitive but painstakingly time-intensive, and due to the qualitative nature of this study, results were not intended for generalization (Creswell, 2014) to the nation as a whole. Therefore, I narrowed the participant search to an accessible population.

**Sampling frame.** The accessible population is defined as adult family members (anyone over the age of 18), living in Texas, whose loved one is incarcerated for an offense, irrespective of where the crime was committed and where the inmate is incarcerated. The sampling frame, from which the study sample was drawn, was selected by working through the Texas Inmate Families Association (TIFA), a non-profit organization, designed to provide support, education and advocacy for offender families (Texas Inmate Families Association, 2014). This sampling frame was incomplete, as this

organization is voluntary and membership requires a \$35 fee, so the use of supplemental support groups, such as Mothers of Incarcerated Sons Society (MISS), Texas State prison outreach agencies, and access to the Walden University research participant pool was used to strengthen the size of the sample available to identify study cases.

**Sampling strategy.** The sampling for this study was purposive, to evaluate distinguishing aspects or characteristics (Patton, 2015). I specifically identified cases that met the broad criteria of “offender family member as victim” to explore the deeper phenomenological experience of trauma and victimization, as it may look, feel and sound different for family members of different ages, genders, races, and those same attributes may be different depending on the type of crime the offender committed. As this purposive strategy is based on the researcher’s subjective assessment of the sampling frame, a representative selection of participants is preferred to gather a wide range of perspectives on the study questions (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008). The samples were selected based on familial attachment to the offender, and if several family members provided consent to participate in the study, only one individual was chosen to serve as the unit of analysis (Patton, 2015).

The purposive sampling strategy most appropriate for this study approach is maximum variation (heterogeneity) sampling (Patton, 2015). Hypotheses that high levels of heterogeneity in a society lead to high levels of crime have been studied and supported (Hansmann, & Quigley, 1982; Kubrin, 2000), so it stands to reason that offenders committing crimes also belong to a heterogeneous group. The primary objective of sampling for a phenomenological study investigating victimization and ensuing trauma is

to identify *what* and *how* the individuals experience the family member's crime and resulting effects. By virtue of the offenders' heterogeneity, so too, must the victims come from a heterogeneous group.

Maximum variation sampling evaluates a diverse group, and as common themes emerge from the diversity, those themes become even more relevant to the study, as they demonstrate commonalities that cut across different ages, genders, races, and cultures (Patton, 2015). Diverse participant selection in the context of this study took into account units of analysis (participants) of different ages, genders, races, ethnicities and cultural/socioeconomic backgrounds, religious affiliation, membership within a marginalized group, and also evaluated family members whose loved one committed different types of crime. For example, a mother of a male offender who committed a violent crime might reveal unique aspects of her victimization that are different from those of a mother of a male offender who committed a non-violent property crime. Evaluating diverse aspects of participants might also reveal certain patterns of "core experiences" (Patton, 2015, p. 283) relevant to all participants, or might also highlight unique struggles for certain members of particular categories (i.e. apathy among men or anger among female children).

**Sample size and characteristics.** The challenge for this study was determining the appropriate sample size, as diversity was already identified as a critical element for consideration; yet, the plausible variables presented a logistical and financial strain on resources aimed at meeting the goals of this qualitative study. The question became whether the research required a large number of people experiencing the same

phenomenon for an examination of perhaps how widespread the phenomenon is (breadth) or whether the research aspired to understand the essence of each individual's understanding of their victimization, trauma and reintegration expectations (depth) (Patton, 2015). The question of breadth usually addresses the attempt at the generalization of findings or prediction of the number of people experiencing the phenomenon of offender family victimization (Englander, 2012); however, the goal of my research was to more broadly attempt to understand the phenomenon of offender family victimization while also to explore a diverse sample to address variations between sample types (Patton, 2015); in which case, interviewing is detailed and in-depth, prohibiting most research from incorporating a large sample size (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015). To reach depth of understanding of the families' victimization, I sought a smaller sample size.

Based on the aforementioned factors, and other phenomenological researcher's recommendations (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015), the intended goal of this study was a target sample size of seven to twelve participants, with a maximum of one adult member from different offender families. While setting a preliminary goal for the number of participants remains a critical component of the research, saturation of data is more important in a qualitative study to ensure that coding has revealed all possible emerging themes, so as to not threaten the study's credibility, often understood as content validity (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Shenton, 2004), in understanding an offender family's perception of their victimization, resulting trauma and roles of reintegration. Fusch and Ness (2015) stressed that while a small sample of seven participants may, in fact, generate no new



data and no new themes, quality of the data is as important as the amount of collected data. To ensure saturation, a larger number of participants will be identified for this study; however, the seven to twelve will be included in the first round of data collection, calling up the additional participants for interviews, should the study not meet the saturation criterion.

Based on the determined maximum variation sampling strategy, and the desire to attain seven to twelve samples for interviewing, I developed a matrix of possible units of analysis (Patton, 2015). This matrix included gender, race and ethnicity (as defined by National Institutes of Health; NIH, 2015), age stratification, strength of religious affiliation, membership to an identified marginalized group, and whether the offender had committed a violent or non-violent offense. In several studies, religion was found to play a prominent role in offender family coping mechanisms (Naser & Visher, 2006; Ofori-Dua et al., 2015; Shollenberger, 2009), and though not the focus of the study, this aspect was thought to provide a unique participant perspective. Additionally, relevant in appreciating the context of the offender family's perspective is their membership within an identified marginalized group, such as the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community, an individual with a disability or belonging to a religious minority, as this may also place the offender family member at risk for community estrangement or additional victimization (Morris, 2014). A final sampling area included whether the offender is currently incarcerated on property, violent, sexual or drug charges, as the family member's perspective on their victimization and level of reintegration support may differ from one criminal offense to another. The matrix is identified as Appendix A.

Inclusion criteria consisted of any adult (18 years and older) related to the offender by blood, marriage, or state-sanctioned common-law statutes, including those as part of a nuclear family, such as a mother, father, siblings, spouse/partner, and adult children. This definition also included individuals the offender states is the person's "family", or those considered to be relationally close to a criminal offender, and to whom the offender is likely to return upon release from incarceration.

Exclusion criteria included any participant who cannot communicate in English, any individual unwilling to be audio-recorded, and individuals who self-identify with a severe mental health disorder and are not in treatment. Participants were also excluded from the study if the interviews could not be conducted in a safe environment for both the interviewer and the participant. Additionally, participants were excluded if the offender is serving a life sentence, without the possibility of parole; and while the family's perspective on victimization and trauma would be beneficial to the first central research question, the second research question, the family's role in reintegration, cannot be adequately addressed. Finally, if the offender committed the crime directly against the family member, to whom the individual will return, the family member was excluded. For example, if a spouse is incarcerated for domestic abuse or family violence, and is expected to return to the family member to whom the violence occurred, that family member was excluded from the study.

**Sample recruitment.** Offender populations are identified as vulnerable (Sutton, Erlen, Glad, & Siminoff, 2003); therefore, access to this population directly, in order to best identify affected family members, remains heavily restricted. I completed the

recruitment of sample participants through identified support groups of offender family members, primarily TIFA and MISS. Moreover, these family members likely have personal connections with other offender families through smaller networks groups that do not publicize through generally understood avenues (such as the court or penal system), which offered these family members access to become part of the study. The Texas Department of Criminal Justice has a specific department, tasked with reentry; whereby, I contacted this department to request assistance with participant recruitment. Additionally, I posted my study within the Walden University research participant pool to afford unique access to offender family members.

Identified organizations assisted me in disseminating the request for participant engagement. A recruitment announcement, defining the purpose of the study and the method by which to contact me (Appendix B), was sent to the organization's primary contact. As individuals contacted me, two steps occurred: (a) a description of the participant study procedures (Appendix C) and a consent to participate form (Appendix D) were sent to the participant candidate for their review, either through email or the postal service, and (b) an appointment was made for an initial screening interview; questions are provided in Appendix E. At no time did I reveal the names of either the study candidates or participants to the assisting organizations.

All participant candidates were interviewed through an initial recorded telephone consultation (Appendix E). During this consultation, I documented, on a hard-copy form, eligibility demographics to ensure each sample unit could be placed within the participant matrix pool, as defined above. These demographics included items such as: relationship

to offender, age, race, ethnicity, religious affiliation, identified gender, type of crime committed, access to safe interview location, and willingness to be recorded.

Additionally, I screened each potential participant against exclusion criteria. On each candidate form, I documented if the individual met all participation requirements, and if not, I stated the reasons on the form and verbally informed the candidate of their exclusion at the conclusion of the screening interview.

From those individuals who sought participation, and who met the inclusion and exclusion requirements, participants were identified through stratification (Patton, 2015), a process to ensure certain participant characteristics are met (Sandelowski, 2000), such as one male, one female, one Hispanic, one violent offender family member, etcetera, to ensure that a representative sample of 15 – 17 would be selected and interviewed for the study. The intent of selecting this number of participants was to approach the higher side of the goal to account for anyone wishing to withdraw from the study, so as to maintain the desired range of seven to twelve participants, as well as to ensure saturation of data and themes.

### **Instrumentation**

The primary data collection instrument used in qualitative studies is the researcher, through the use of in-depth and personal interviews and participant observation (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015). For this study, I employed the use of two researcher-developed interview sets, one structured (Appendix E) and one semistructured (Appendix F). Additionally, during the semistructured interview, I collected observational notes on separate observation sheets for each participant. I audio-recorded

each interview. Although not required from participants, if they provided collateral data, such as letters, news clippings or legal documents, these were considered part of the data set for the participant, and if permitted by the participants, copies would have been made, authentication determined (as necessary), and would be retained by me in a secure file storage. No participants provided such data; however, several participants shared pictures and personal artifacts, of which none were retained.

**Researcher-developed instruments.** The first structured interview instrument I used in this study was the participant screening tool (Appendix E). This structured interview set was based on necessary inclusion and exclusion criteria for participation in the study. This instrument consisted of a set of closed-ended questions, requiring a specified answer from the respondent, and required no personal opinions or elaboration (Creswell, 2013). The estimated time for completion was five to seven minutes.

I used the second interview instrument only with the selected study participants (Appendix F). This semistructured interview protocol consisted of key elements: (a) title of the interview topic, (b) date, time, and location of the interview, (c) name (or assigned numerical code) of the research participant and interviewer, (d) brief description of the purpose for the study, and (e) relevant questions (Creswell, 2013) aimed at encouraging the participants to describe their experience of the phenomenon of victimization and their resulting trauma. Additionally, the interview protocol for this study confirmed that the participant signed the consent to participate form.

While I asked each participant the exact same question, in the same order, additional probing questions were needed in order to elicit a more thorough investigation

of the participant's response (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008; Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). Probing questions were also contained in the interview instrument, but were not pertinent to all participants, and some participants' responses elicited further probing questions. As I used more frequently-asked probing questions, I added these questions to the interview questionnaire. Additionally, as qualitative research is "emergent" (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012, p. 5) by design, as new insights occurred and questions arose throughout an interview, they were added to future interview protocols, and were asked of previously interviewed participants in recorded follow-up telephone calls.

**Rationale for interview protocol.** The research questions had to focus on meeting the descriptions of the phenomenon under review (Englander, 2012); which, in this study includes victimization, emotional trauma, and individual needs for coping and assisting with the offender's reintegration. Each participant's experience of the offender's behavior, resulting discovery of the offense, and their life after the offender's incarceration is unique within their own context; however, each participant had a similar frame of reference, as they are each connected to an offender through their familial attachment.

The phenomenon of victimization and emotional trauma are often described with terms, such as *numbness* or *shock*; the individual may even deny the events have occurred, and they often experience physical complications, such as sleeplessness or varying degrees of physical pain or anxiety (National Center for Victims of Crime, 2012) and the purpose of this study was to explore if, in fact, offender family members do

describe their own experiences in similar, or entirely new, terms. Each question, though identical for each participant, allowed the participant to explore their personal situation and in the timeframe in which they experienced it (Englander, 2012). Though the interview protocol sought to address the primary and sub-research questions, it was imperative that the questions “directed” but did not “lead” (Englander, 2012, p. 26) the participant into providing responses that I may have preferred.

Content validity, for both instruments, was reached by ensuring that each interview question closely represented the intent of the screening criteria and each research question and subquestion. Content for the screening interview addressed only relevant data necessary to determine if the participant candidate qualified for or should have been excluded from the study. Content for the participant interview was developed in congruence with each of the two primary research questions and the six subquestions, and while deeper exploration into the lived experiences of the offender family member might have been interesting, the questions may not have been appropriate or relevant to the research study under review. Additionally, two individuals, one with personal experience of crime victimization and the other, a relative of an incarcerated father, reviewed the research questions and provided feedback on the interview questions for relevancy to the phenomena under review. Neither of the instrument reviewers were considered for participation in this study, as their input was solely for the purpose of content validity.

### **Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

As previously detailed in the sample recruitment section, participant candidates were notified of the study through several sources, and after contacting me, were screened against inclusion and exclusion criteria through an audio-recorded telephone interview, using Boldbeast Call Recorder software for Android phones. The screening interview data was handwritten on the interview form, and indicated if the candidate was eligible or ineligible for the study. The handwritten data were compared with the audio-recording to ensure accuracy, but was necessary for the researcher to transcribe from the screening data collection sheet to the participant matrix (Appendix A). All eligible candidates had their screening interview data entered into the participant matrix (Appendix A), and a diverse participant pool of 15 – 17 individuals were contacted for scheduling their face-to-face interview with me. Those candidates, whose screening interviews made them ineligible for the study, were informed at the time of their telephone screening interview that they were ineligible for the study; however, their data collection forms have been maintained as part of the study material.

I collected participant data on the interview forms during their face-to-face interview, which were conducted in a location to ensure privacy and confidentiality, and all data was transferred to an electronic Microsoft Word file. Each participant has their own electronic and hard-copy file. Each interview was audio-recorded with the Ann Bully digital audio voice recorder, and all audio-recordings were transcribed for written corroboration with any ancillary notes I made. Of note, the individual responsible for the transcription had no access to participant identifying information, and was required to



sign a confidentiality agreement prior to receiving any data (Appendix G). I interviewed each participant in this manner one time, and most interviews lasted no more than 1.5 hours. As follow-up questions occurred, to ensure data thoroughness, those questions were added to the participant's interview protocol form.

I created a plan to evaluate new participants if the number of participants fell below the minimum of seven, in the event that participants withdrew from the study, or if saturation had not been met. This plan included reevaluating the participant matrix for additional diverse participants and beginning the interview process again. This process ultimately was not necessary, as ample participants joined the study.

Following each face-to-face interview, while still being audio-recorded, I conducted a debriefing interview as a means of reviewing the purpose of the research study as well as to determine if the participant had experienced any adverse impact by the interview process (Stangor, 2013). After I explained the purpose and significance of the study, the participant was offered the opportunity to ask questions they may had about the study (Appendix F). When the participant expressed any emotional concerns following their participation, I offered mental health resources, specific for their geographic area. I also requested that the participant did not discuss the study for at least six months following their interview, as a means of preserving the integrity of the study (Stangor, 2013). At the conclusion of the interview and debriefing process, each participant was given \$30 for their participation. Allowances were made to give the \$30 to a participant if he or she chose to end the study, prior to the conclusion of the interview; however, no participant ended the study early.

During the debriefing stage, I explained that the interview would be transcribed, and the participant was afforded the opportunity to read the document, upon its transcription completion, for any necessary corrections. The completed transcription was either mailed or emailed to each participant, depending on their preferred method of receipt. I included all participant corrections into the written portion of their interview data set for data analysis. Two participants sent me changes to their transcriptions, via email. These edits included grammatical and spelling error corrections, but no substantive changes to the interview data. Each participant was allowed to preserve the transcribed report for their records.

Additionally, each participant received a one- or two-page summary of preliminary findings, such as developing themes, which granted them the opportunity to comment or reflect on the accuracy of interpretations. The findings were also sent via mail or email, based on their preference. No participants responded to the findings; however, several of them thanked me for their opportunity to participate. I reminded each participant, during the debriefing stage, that all of their data and research files will remain confidential, will be store in both a locked file cabinet and password-protected external hard drive, and will be retained for seven years, as outlined in the Consent to Participate form (Appendix D).

### **Data Analysis Plan**

I began data analysis with the first interview and observations, primarily as an effort to refine interview questions and pursue deeper discovery with subsequent participants; while follow-up questions were asked as necessary and as allowed by

participants. Observational data, through written field notes, were incorporated and organized with corresponding transcribed interview data, as a means to substantiate or disagree with interview data the participant provided. Additionally, through the assemblage of each participant's data, interpretations began to develop, fostering the gathering of developing themes. This process, though described in a step-wise fashion was not linear, with one step of collection leading to the next; but rather, iterative, where each new set of data required additional review of previous data (Creswell, 2009).

The first step in the data analysis process involved the organization of participant data (Creswell, 2009), which involved an initial read of each set of transcribed interview data for accuracy. Each participant's interview data was then compiled with all of my notes and any data concerning participant-provided collateral material. During this first step, I made notes on evolving themes, preparing the data for the next step of a deeper review of the text.

The second step engaged me directly with the interview and supportive data, as I read each participant's data for a broad understanding of ideas expressed by each participant (Creswell, 2009). I took notes on developing themes and reviewed other participant's data as necessary for collaboration or assessment of similarity. Creswell (2009) recognizes the importance of this step as a means of evaluating the overall "tone" and "depth" (p. 185) of the participant's message.

The third step commanded a closer inspection of the data through the identification of similar topics, key words or phrases permeating the data sets, a process of coding (Creswell, 2009). Coding can summarize a participant's ideas and will draw

attention to repetitive thoughts or comments throughout all data, and should develop around the intended research questions (Saldaña, 2009). I conducted this step by hand after reading the interview transcriptions several times. Though laborious, coding conducted by hand allows me to gain a more intimate inspection of the data (Patton, 2015). Coded terms arose from the phenomenon of living through personal trauma, private perceptions of experiencing victimization, and the participants' own values and expectations of their role in reintegration.

Step four conceptualizes the oftentimes large number of codes into a smaller number of themes or more complex units of meaning, arising from the collective data; whereupon, Creswell (2009) further describes these themes as primary headings for the research findings. As the data advances themes, "textural descriptions" (Creswell, 2013, p. 193) take shape, of what the participants experienced with their lived phenomenon of victimization, trauma and any anticipated role for reentry. The themes also help the formation of "structural descriptions" (Creswell, 2013, p. 194) of how the phenomenon progressed for the participants.

A final step, intended to ensure an element of quality control on code and theme development, I requested the assistance of an associate researcher, as a form of peer-review for the coding process (Creswell, 2013). Participant demographic data was blinded from the reviewer, and all responses were anonymous; however, the reviewer did have access to the research questions and subquestions, as well as all transcribed interviews. Identified codes or themes were cross-referenced to my own findings, and any newly-developed or contradictory themes were reviewed with the associate researcher for

resolution. It was assumed that the associate researcher would not perform an exhaustive review of the coding and thematic development; whereas, I did perform this step.

To ensure this final step provided consistency and adequate quality control, I trained the associate researcher on the steps necessary to review each transcribed interview prior to the associate researcher receiving any data. I provided clean electronic copies of each participant's transcribed data, along with the two research questions and associated subquestions, to the associate researcher. I asked the reviewer to read each interview in its entirety to identify frequently-used terms, making notes of developing codes. Once the associate researcher established a reasonable set of codes, I asked her to formulate some developing themes, which arose from the codes. After the associate researcher identified codes and evolving themes, I conducted a teleconference with the reviewer to discuss our identified codes, overlapping codes, or divergent codes, and subsequently developed a consensus on the codes and unfolding themes as to their relevance and meaning, as they related to the research questions.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

Qualitative research has long been considered lacking a source of foundation of fact, when compared to quantitative studies, offering qualitative researchers an opportunity to demonstrate chosen studies do, in fact, undergo sufficient rigor in process, especially when evaluated in the context of a naturalistic study, such as this phenomenological research (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative researchers employ unique terminology to address issues of reliability and validity, and this study employed the terms defined in Lincoln's and Guba's 1985 work, *Naturalistic Inquiry* (Creswell, 2013):

credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. This study identified limitations, and sought to address issues of credibility, by clearly demonstrating the phenomenon of victimization and trauma; transferability, through the exposure of offender families' environments across a variety of situations; dependability, with the development of repeatable methodology; and confirmability, through the authentic exploration of participants' realities and not through my own expectations (Shenton, 2004).

### **Credibility**

This qualitative study sought credibility by ensuring that the process and analysis accurately measured the phenomena of victimization, trauma and roles of reentry, experienced by offender families, a term known to quantitative researchers as internal validity (Shenton, 2004). Strategies employed in this component are also incorporated in other areas addressing the study's trustworthiness, such as spending considerable time with each participant to gauge a clear understanding and valuable perspective on the context in which they have lived the phenomena of a trauma survivor and victim of the offender's behavior; providing transcripts and final interpretations to each research participant, so they can voluntarily support or refute any of the information for accuracy, a process defined as *member checking* (Creswell, 2013, p. 191); and using observational, interview or collateral data, having the written word supported by audio-recording, as well as data from past research in the area of offender family suffering, data was triangulated (Creswell, 2014) to ensure they support each other to produce valid information from which findings are illuminated.

Though I intended to have a broader perspective of participants in this study, and even with a relatively small sample size, credibility was earned through data saturation which ensured that coding revealed all possible emerging themes (Fusch & Ness, 2015). If I had not achieved data saturation, I would have included additional participants in the process; however, I believe that saturation was achieved. Finally, credibility was also advanced through the implementation of an external audit trail, as recommended by Patton (2002). The audit trail was conducted through the expert analysis of the study content, design and findings, as reviewed by my dissertation committee, including a content expert, a methodology expert and an assigned University Research Reviewer.

### **Transferability**

While quantitative studies seek generalizability of findings to larger and broader populations, qualitative studies, due to the nature of their smaller sample sizes and specificity of environmental questions, do not have this specific aspiration; however, the possibility that qualitative findings could actually resemble similar settings, contexts and populations cannot be ruled out, and therefore should be considered as possible for the study's external validation (Shenton, 2004). Allowing for the possibility of a select few offender families' experiences in one area of the country, to transfer to experiences of other families throughout the country offers this concept of transferability. I sought to provide rich detail and sufficient evidence of contextual similarity between the selected participants and a broader group of offender families, such as would be seen throughout the country, so that the reader can make their own connection of transferability (Shenton, 2004). This was made possible through the intentional process of participant selection,

specifically by seeking participants who offered diversity within the population, both in personal attributes and criminal behavior of the offender.

### **Dependability**

The question of reliability of both process and results are addressed through the qualitative concept of dependability; whereby, should this study be repeated using the prescribed methods and participants by another researcher, similar outcomes would result (Shenton, 2004). From a practical standpoint, however, participant responses of their perception of victimization and trauma may vary from researcher to researcher, especially as time may alter these perspectives. However, I developed and employed meticulous steps in the recruitment, selection, interviewing, field observation recording and data validation with each participant, in an effort to ensure that should another researcher wish, the study could be replicated and present similar findings.

### **Confirmability**

The introduction of researcher bias into qualitative studies can produce a damaging blow to what is understood as objectivity, or the assurance that findings are those of the participants' and not of the researcher (Shenton, 2004). I included several steps to demonstrate confirmability of study findings, including triangulation, member checking, clarification of research bias, and the presentation of discrepant findings (Creswell, 2009).

I spent approximately two hours with each participant, including the screening and study interviews, and while this is an extended time in the field (Creswell, 2009), study findings are best confirmed by examining themes against other sources of data,



such as themes from past research with offender families, allowing for triangulation of other data sources to affirm or contradict researcher conclusions (Creswell, 2013). This strategy is further supported when the participants in this study were offered the opportunity to review findings for accuracy, and while this review was not required of the participants, I highly encouraged. In this regard, each participant received a copy of their transcribed data to review for accuracy, and they also received a draft production of the study's findings, including developed themes, which afforded them the opportunity to comment and reflect on the accuracy of interpretations (Creswell, 2009).

While bracketing the researcher's personal experiences and assumptions about the subject material is critical to the confirmability of qualitative phenomenological studies (Creswell, 2013), so too is the clarification of any research bias. I hold particular assumptions about familial victimization and trauma; yet, these assumptions did not become the formation of findings; only participant experiences and perceptions constructed this study's conclusions. My assumptions and biases are delineated in the study findings, making clear demarcations between my beliefs and participant experiences.

Though I sought to understand offender families' understanding of their victimization, trauma and ability to provide reentry support, I discovered that some participants hold discrepant beliefs or perceptions from others within the study. These findings are just as important to the research as are responses in support of the identified research questions, and are addressed within the study findings. As Creswell (2013) recognizes, not all participant data will fit within developing themes, and offering

balanced treatment of these findings will provide further depth to the overall complexity of the lives of offender families. Additionally, I afforded interpretation for these disconfirming cases to ensure study confirmability and the necessary distance between researcher bias and actual data.

### **Intracoder Reliability**

I was solely responsible for the collection and analysis of study data; however, I wanted to ensure that qualitative reliability was met, and I established consistency in the treatment and review of data (Creswell, 2009). Procedural steps are well-documented within this methodology chapter, including a complete participant selection and interview protocol and plan for repeated researcher coding procedures for consistency. The use of a second coder for analysis was not practical, as I did not have access to a content expert for the research material, making intercoder reliability unattainable; however, I enlisted the assistance of an associate researcher to review coding and thematic development as a means to provide peer review, but with the understanding that this individual is not an expert on this study's content.

### **Ethical Procedures**

Prior to my engagement with any potential study participants, I obtained approval of this research study by the Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Five primary ethical considerations were addressed at the time of the proposal submission: (a) study participants may experience additional emotional stress throughout the interview process, (b) anonymity of each participant throughout the study process, including interviews, data analysis, study results, and final production of the dissertation must be

assured (c) the offering of a financial incentive for participation, (d) acknowledging the voluntary nature of the study, and (e) disseminating, securing and storing data.

I intended to examine a family member's experience with victimization, their sense of enduring trauma, and their role in reintegration, and I acknowledged that some participants may experience an emotional burden through this exploration, one that I would not intend; therefore, efforts were made to mitigate the potential. Once a study candidate contacted me, and prior to engaging in the interview process, an outline of the participant study procedures (Appendix C) and a consent to participate (Appendix D) was sent to each individual. This was done to prepare the participant for the content of the study, and afforded them ample time to consider their personal risks and benefits of their participation. The participant study procedures detailed each step that a participant would take throughout the study process, including the recruitment, interview, and post-interview phase. Descriptions of the aim of the study and types of questions asked of the participant were included, and addressed what I intended to provide, if the participant needed professional help, following their interview. The consent to participate form included similar information, but also informed the participant that they had the opportunity to leave the study at any time. No participants requested professional follow-up information, and no participant left the study.

Additionally, both the participant study procedures and consent to participate form detailed my efforts to maintain all participants' anonymity and confidentiality. Once a candidate agreed to conduct the screening interview, the individual was immediately assigned a numerical code, which was the only identifier used throughout the entire

study, beginning with the placement of study criteria within the participant matrix (Appendix A), and ending with the study results and final writing of the dissertation. At no time did I report to the recruitment organizations the identity of any study candidates or participants. Additionally, interview locations were suggested by the participant, and occurred at that location only if privacy and confidentiality was assured. When this did not happen, I secured a location that was convenient for the participant, such that privacy and confidentiality was assured. This included my securing a conference room at a local hotel and a private room with a door at the local library.

Though mentioned in a previous section, the ethical use of a stipend bears repeating. Not intended to be used as an incentive for participation, but rather as modest compensation for the participant's time, I gave all participants \$30 once they completed their semistructured interview. This amount is largely seen as an amount that would not give the impression of coercion for one's participation in a research study (Grady, 2005).

Participation in this study was entirely voluntary. The voluntary nature of the study is addressed in both the participant study procedures and consent to participate (Appendices C and D), and at any stage in the process, a participant was allowed to withdraw without negative consequences, and I informed each participant that if they chose to withdraw, they would still receive the \$30. No participants withdrew from the study.

All data remained accessible to me and only audio-recording data was accessible to a hired transcriptionist. The transcriptionist signed a confidentiality agreement (Appendix G) prior to any exchange of audio-recordings, and only had the numerical

code of each participant as identifying information for the assigned recording. Electronic data, including all audio-recordings, transcriptions and tabulations are stored on an external hard drive, accessible only through my password-protected private computer. All hard-copy data, including field and interview notes, observations, and signed consent to participate forms are maintained in a locked cabinet in my personal home-office. All data will be stored for seven years following completion of the study, upon which time all data will be destroyed. This information is contained in the consent to participate form.

### **Summary**

While some research has sought to address the impact of incarceration upon family members and necessary coping mechanisms (Naser & Visser, 2006, Ofori-Dua et al., 2015; Shollenberger, 2009), little has explored their personal sense of victimization and resulting trauma, as well as their unmet needs for how to best serve as the cornerstone for the offender's return. Most research in offender reintegration has been conducted from the perspective of the offender's needs, and while the importance of this component cannot be dismissed, those to whom the offender returns have suffered greatly and will serve as a support system for their returning loved one, and without a clearer understanding of their hurt, loss and violations, the role they have in reintegration is severely undermined.

This chapter addressed the methodology by which I collected data and assessed the impact upon offender family members. Specific research questions and related subquestions set the tone for undertaking this qualitative phenomenological study; whereby, I intended to play a complete participant role throughout the participant

recruitment, screening, interviewing, data analysis and interpretation. The study's recruitment, selection and interviewing instrumentation and process have been meticulously described, should future researchers choose to replicate the work, and the data analysis plan specifies my approach to how I effectively coded and formed themes, based on participant responses, which were member-checked by each individual participant. Potential ethical concerns, and issues of study trustworthiness have also been appropriately addressed. Study results are presented in Chapter 4.

## Chapter 4: Results

### Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the level of victimization and emotional trauma experienced by offender family members, irrespective of the type of crime committed by the offender. Additionally, the purpose of this study was to examine the family members' perceptions of necessary psychological support and community empathy to effectively perform their anticipated roles in the offender's reentry process, in an effort to reduce recidivism. While much of the current literature focuses on the offender's perception of what is needed for effective reintegration, there remains a deficient exploration into the lived experiences of the family members, who suffer great emotional, spiritual, financial, and physical loss due to their loved one's criminal behavior, including their perceptions of their victimization and ability to aid in the offender's reintegration.

To address the research questions, I administered semistructured interviews with participants to gain insight into their personal experiences of victimization and trauma, resulting from the offender's crime, by asking them questions concerning (a) emotions they experienced immediately following the discovery of a criminal act, as well as throughout the judicial process, (b) any physical reactions they may have experienced, (c) changes in relationships with friends, family members, neighbors or the larger community, and (d) coping mechanisms employed. To better discern the family members' perceived roles and responsibility with the reintegration process, I asked them specifically of their level of responsibility and roles they expect to play, once the offender

returns home. They were also asked if they would be willing to participate in an RJ program, should it be a part of the offender's reentry process.

This chapter includes a description of the process by which I collected the data, including the study setting, participant recruitment procedures, participant demographics, and the manner in which I collected data from each of the participants. I then present data analysis methodology, including identifying codes and developing categories and themes. Following data analysis, I review the evidence of trustworthiness to support the study and its findings. The final section of this chapter includes study results, which served to address the research questions.

### **Setting**

I used a qualitative approach to explore the lived experiences of offender family members, and the phenomena of emotional trauma due to their victimization and their anticipated role in reintegration. Because the interview questions I selected contained highly personal and sensitive information, individual family members were interviewed in a location of their choosing, which provided the most privacy, safety and comfort for them (see Appendix C). While four locations were less than ideal, as four participants had family members present, including children, none of the participants stopped their interview. However, I suspect one or more of the four participants may not have been completely forthcoming in some of their responses because other family members were present during the interview. For example, one female participant paused before a response, looked to see if her husband was present, and whispered a response.



### **Participant Recruitment**

Upon receiving approval from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB), approval number 07-18-17-0537790, I sought four sources of offender families, from which to recruit potential participants: Mothers of Incarcerated Sons Society (MISS), Texas Inmates Families Association (TIFA), The Texas Department of Criminal Justice – Reentry Department (TDCJ), and the Walden University research participant pool. I reached out to the primary contact of MISS and requested permission to post the participant recruitment flyer on their Facebook website, as this organization only communicates with its members through this channel. This was approved, and the flyer was posted once every week from July 19 through August 26 (6 weeks). I approached the chairman of the board and an additional key member of TIFA to secure a method of providing the recruitment flyer to its members, as this organization attempts to protect its members from non-member communications. The chairman approved the flyer, and sent it electronically to each member, as well as posted it on their site, within a secured portal. The flyer was sent July 20 and remained on their site until August 25 (6 weeks).

In an effort to recruit participants from TDCJ, I worked for 6 weeks, after IRB approval, to ensure flyer availability through the Reentry Division. While the IRB approval letter was submitted, the flyer was delivered, and the application was properly completed and submitted, I never received confirmation that the recruitment flyer was ever distributed or made available. Finally, the study recruitment was published and made available to Walden University students July 28 through September 28 (9 weeks).

Interested participants from any of the above organizations were to contact me directly by phone or email to arrange an initial telephone screening interview. Through the use of a screening interview, I gathered demographic data on the participant (e.g., gender, age, ethnicity, religious affiliation), general information on the offender (e.g., relationship between the offender and family member, type of crime committed), agreement to be audio-recorded, and whether or not the participant was under psychiatric treatment. Once screened, I scheduled the participant for a face-to-face interview with me. I wanted seven to twelve participants to reach thematic saturation. In total, 23 individuals contacted me about the study; 17 participants completed the initial telephone screening and four individuals were ultimately excluded or declined to participate. A total of 13 individuals participated in the study.

I used a purposeful sampling strategy with the goal of meeting a broad criteria of adult family members of offenders within an age range of 18 and older, with diverse ethnic backgrounds, gender, and types of crime committed by the offender. Each interested individual had to participate in an initial telephone screening interview, in which inclusion and exclusion criteria had to be met.

### **Demographics**

The study's participant pool consisted of 13 individuals, living in different cities around the state of Texas. The demographic results were derived from the criteria described in both Chapters 1 and 3, and came from the screening and the face-to-face interview. A total of one man and 12 women, ages 33 to 75 ( $\bar{x} = 53.1$ ,  $Md = 56$ ,  $Mo = 33$ ), completed the study. Of those, nine were White, two were Hispanic, and two were Black.

Nine of the participants self-reported a strong religious affiliation, three stated they had a modest religious affiliation, and one reported being an atheist. None of the participants disclosed having an affiliation with a marginalized group, such as belonging to the LGBT community, a religious minority or being disabled. Each participant represented a single unit from the family associated with the offender, with the following associations: one father, seven mothers, one grandmother, three married partners, and one non-married partner. Four of the participants reported living zero to 100 miles from where the offender is incarcerated, four disclosed living 100 to 200 miles from their family member, and five stated that they live over 200 miles from their loved one.

### **Data Collection**

Once an interested individual contacted me about participating in the study, I sent them a consent to participate form and the participant study procedures document. One person requested that the forms be mailed to her via the U.S. Postal Service, while all others were emailed the documents to their preferred email address. Four of the 23 interested participants contacted me by telephone, and at that time I informed them that I would need to send them the consent to participate form and the participant study procedures document prior to conducting the initial screening, allowing them ample time to review the documents before moving forward on the screening. The emailed (or mailed) documents were preceded by an introductory note, stating my name and purpose of the study, an explanation of the attached documents, a request for them to read each document carefully, making note of any questions they had for me, and a list of dates and times available for the screening interview, which took place the week of August 7 – 14.

I conducted the screening interviews over the telephone and recorded the conversations using Boldbeast Call Recorder software for Android phones, with the average time to conduct the screening interviews of 12.27 minutes. It was, however, stated within the participant study procedures that the screening interview would last five to seven minutes. At the start of each call, I asked the individuals if they had read both documents and if they had questions about either. Additionally, I asked each caller the identical questions on the screening interview, and I recorded their answers on a hard-copy form. On the call, I reminded each of them, that if they met all inclusion criteria, they would be asked to participate in a face-to-face interview, which could last up to 1.5 hours, and I asked if that was still acceptable. I also reinforced the fact that their identifying data would be coded for confidentiality in their interview.

Of the original 23 interested participants, six individuals chose not to proceed with the screening interview, four stating that they did not have the time to commit to the project, and the remaining two declined because they had “no interest”. After the 17 remaining individuals participated in the screening interview, one individual declined to move forward on the face-to-face interview, stating that she was concerned for her privacy. Three individuals were excluded from the study: one for refusing to be recorded, and two for being the direct victim of the offender, who was currently incarcerated. I destroyed the telephone recordings, digital communication and paper documents of the four individuals, who did not participate in the face-to-face interview (emails deleted, Boldbeast recordings deleted and paper screening form shredded).

Each of the 13 final participants discovered the research study through TIFA. None of the other three participant pool resources produced any interested individuals. It remains unknown if TDCJ complied with my requests for participation in the study recruitment.

I scheduled the remaining 13 participants for face-to-face interviews, beginning August 15, and I arranged the appointment dates based on their residence location to facilitate my travel schedule. I asked the participants to pick a time and location that worked best for their schedule. All complied with this request, except for one participant who, after five attempts to schedule, was unable to accommodate a face-to-face interview, due to her business travel itinerary. I chose to interview this participant over the telephone, due to her unique situation, and I recorded the entire interview using the Boldbeast Call Recorder software for Android phones. Due to private security concerns, three of the participants requested that I find a private and quiet location where the interviews could be conducted, rather than in their home, which I did.

Each of the 12 participants, who agreed to have a face-to-face interview, kept their appointments, and each interview started on time. Each participant consented to have their interviews audio-recorded, and though each was recorded, I took notes on a hard-copy form, which remained in full view of each participant throughout the interview. I asked each participant identical questions, as outlined in the participant interview questions (Appendix F). When necessary, I asked secondary questions of individual participants if I needed the participant to clarify their statement or to expound on an idea or comment. I asked one question, which arose out of relevancy for coping

mechanisms for the spouse of the offender, of two participants during the face-to-face interview, and asked over a recorded follow-up telephone conversation with an additional two participants. The question I asked was “During this time, of your partner’s incarceration, were you ever engaged in a physical or emotional relationship with another individual?”

At the beginning of each interview, I reminded each participant that the interview was scheduled to last up to 1.5 hours, I assured each of them that I was available for their personal account for as long as they needed to respond to the questions. Based on that directive, the recording time, as verified by the unedited digital recordings and the transcriptionist’s time-stamp, the interviews lasted anywhere from 36 minutes to 147 minutes, with an average time of 88.15 minutes.

While I conducted the majority of the face-to-face interviews according to the participant study procedures (Appendix C), five of the participants chose to conduct their face-to-face interviews in an environment which did not ensure their complete privacy. These participants had other family members in my presence, and at times, those family members’ comments can be heard on the recordings; however, these additional individuals’ comments are not included in the study results below. Additionally, as noted above, a single participant had her study interview conducted on the telephone, to accommodate her travel schedule with the timeframe allotted for the study interviews. I transcribed this participant’s interview rather than having the appointed transcriptionist conduct this step, as technological difficulties precluded me from transferring the recorded data.

### **Data Analysis**

The data under analysis advanced through semistructured, face-to-face interview questions. While each participant answered standardized questions, the semistructured format offered freedom for each participant to freely address the question, and allowed me to ask for clarification or expansion of ideas. Each participant answered 24 questions, divided into three categories: (a) background information on the offender, (b) the family member's personal meaning of victimization and trauma, and (c) the family member's personal definition of their roles and responsibility in the offender's reintegration. The last two categories explicitly addressed the study's research questions, as previously outlined in Chapter 3.

Upon completion of each face-to-face interview, the audio-recording was individually sent to the transcriptionist. All interviews were completed within one week, creating a delay of approximately two weeks, for all transcriptions to be returned. While waiting on the transcribed interviews, I listened to each audio-recording, but made no notes. I chose to listen to the interview in a new perspective – not being seated across from the participant, not being distracted by activities within the interview environment, and not trying to fit their words into developing themes around the study's research questions. The second time I listened to each recording, in order of their alpha-numeric code, I made notes of key words used within each of the two primary research questions (personal meaning of victimization and trauma, and roles and responsibilities in reintegration). These coded units were then put into a spreadsheet for a total numerical count.

Once I received each participant's transcribed interview, I read each one twice, making sure to highlight descriptive words. The first reading was focused on the participant's perception of trauma and victimization (addressing research question one), while the second reading attended to their role and responsibility in reintegration (addressing research question two). While the questions were arranged to delineate the research questions, the participants made references throughout the interview that addressed both research questions at different times. For example, while asking about future reentry plans with her son (Question 3.3), participant A03 stated that she should have said "no" more to her son, which caused her repeated problems with his repeated criminal behavior. This example gave rise to code development in both, her perceptions of trauma and victimization (Questions 2.1-2.10) and perceptions on roles and responsibilities, but had to be evaluated separately during the two different transcript readings.

Each highlighted word was then compared to the count created in the spreadsheet from the earlier identified code, created from listening to the audio-recordings. Codes, from individual participant's interviews, were organized into clusters of synonym descriptors, used by each of the participants. These clusters of codes developed into broader categories related to the participants' personal understanding of trauma and victimization, both prior to experiencing their loved one's criminal behavior and after the discovery. Participants used 38 unique descriptors to describe their perceptions of prior trauma, while they articulated 55 unique codes to define their perceptions of trauma after discovery. These codes advanced into thematic states of emotional feelings surrounding



the participants' perceptions of trauma and victimization, and while prior trauma and trauma after discovery had some overlap, trauma after discovery developed into broader emotional themes. Resulting themes are as follows:

- Prior trauma/victimization

Sadness	Self-contempt
Loss	Pain
Anger	Helplessness
Fear	

- Post-discovery trauma/victimization

Sadness	Self-contempt
Loss	Calm/Relief
Anger	Helplessness
Fear	Chaos/Stress

Thematic development for understanding the complexity of participants' perceptions of their trauma and victimization extends beyond emotional qualifiers, reaching into their previous relationships with the offender, coping mechanisms, physical reactions, interactions with others within communities and plays into their beliefs of their roles in the offender's reintegration. Therefore, the development of themes to answer all of the research questions was conducted in the same manner as the thematic development of traumatic reactions. After I listened to and read each transcript a minimum of two times, codes were identified within each question, given a numerical count of participant references on the study worksheet, and themes within each category evolved. Below each

research question and corresponding subquestion I identified thematic categories.

Overarching themes developed:

- Acceptance of a heavy financial burden
- Use of diverse coping mechanisms
- System blaming
- Families' unwavering support
- Reentry remains undefined
- Need for restorative justice

Specific data and findings are discussed in greater detail in a following section; however, it is critical to introduce two discrepant cases. Participant A07 (Black female) and Participant A13 (Caucasian female) self-identified as a partner of an offender; one is legally married to a male offender, and the other is engaged to a male offender. Neither participant knew the offender prior to the crime, but met him while he was incarcerated. Both of these participants' data were evaluated for emerging codes and themes; yet, their perceptions of trauma upon discovery could not be included in the results or final analysis. While findings for this study are not intended to generalize to a broader population, both participants' interviews, however, yielded compelling material on coping, emotional support and roles in reintegration, relevant to individuals in similar situations, and therefore, were retained in the participant pool.

## **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

### **Credibility**

To accurately measure the phenomena of victimization, trauma and roles of reentry, as experienced by offender family members, described by Shenton (2004) as internal validity, I implemented three strategies, each of which helped to triangulate the data (Creswell, 2014) gathered through audio-recordings, written notes and observation. The first strategy implemented was to spend considerable time with each participant to gauge a clear understanding and valuable perspective on the context of their lived experiences surrounding the offender's criminal behavior. While I preemptively explained that the interviews would last up to one and a half hours, six of the 13 participants exceeded the requested 90 minutes. Several of them would have likely continued; however, I tried to remain mindful of the expectations I set and wanted to respect their time. Six participants, however, fell well below the anticipated 90 minutes, and while the participants adequately provided answers to the questions, the responses did not reach the anticipated depth of experience that I had hoped to achieve. This will be discussed further in the findings, conclusions and implications in Chapter 5.

The second strategy employed in achieving credibility was to provide transcripts to each participant for their corrections or further thoughts on their responses. After each audio-recording was transcribed, that document was emailed to each participant, and I requested that they review the transcribed interview and respond to me with any corrections and/or comments. Two participants (A02 and A15) sent back transcriptions with appropriate edits; one participant (A07) sent advocacy letters, on behalf of her

fiancée, which helped to underscore her experiences; finally, participant A08 submitted an addendum to her interview to further detail her perspective on post-discovery victimization. This process of *member checking* (Creswell, 2013, p.191) allowed the participants an opportunity to affirm that their feelings and experiences are represented. At the conclusion of each interview, I assured each participant that they would also receive a draft of the study results prior to submission of the dissertation for approval, and this was completed.

The third step used to ensure credibility was to incorporate observational or collateral data, gathered during or following the interview. Two participants (A11 and A14) shared pictures of the offender with me, and their reactions were documented on the interview worksheet, which are discussed within the results section below. Additionally, at several points during the interviews, three participants (B01, A02, A03) became visibly upset as they recalled memories, while others (A08, A14, A15) demonstrated agitation or animation while recounting experiences; each of these observations were noted within my research notes, and are also discussed in greater depth in the results section below.

To attempt intra-coder reliability, as the use of a second coder with in-depth content knowledge for analysis was not practical, I worked with an associate researcher who assisted with this task. This person reviewed each transcript and developed codes and resulting themes as a means to provide peer review. After the associate researcher performed the transcript review, developed codes and themes were compared with ones that I had constructed. I merged similarities between the two reviews, and when

discrepant themes were presented, the researcher and I discussed how of if the themes fit the research questions.

### **Transferability**

My goal of achieving transferability was attained through intentionally seeking participants from Texas who offer diversity within the broader population of the United States. This allows for the possibility of a select few offender families' experiences in one area of the country, to transfer to experiences of other families throughout the country or the world. While I did not intend for the experiences of my participants to generalize to this larger population, the descriptions of their lived experiences are rich and descriptive, allowing the reader to transfer the participants' experiences to other settings, due to shared characteristics (Creswell, 2013). For example, a father in Texas (B01) expressed sadness for the loss of his son to the criminal justice system; while a father in Illinois, reading this study's results, may also relate to this sadness, irrespective of the type of crime committed, or the father's race or age, because of the rich detail of the bond between a father and his son.

### **Dependability**

To ensure that this study was dependable, or easily replicated by another researcher, I employed meticulous steps in the recruitment, selection, interviewing, observational and thematic documentation process of each participant, as noted above. Though different participants would provide their own unique perceptions on their victimization and traumatic responses to a loved one's criminal behavior, as well as for their insights on their roles and responsibilities of reintegration, another researcher,

should they wish to replicate this study, would likely discover similar codes and developing themes, based on the detailed results and findings outlined in following sections.

### **Confirmability**

To ensure confirmability of this study's findings, or the assurance that the results are those of the participants' and not based upon my research or personal bias, I implemented four steps: (a) triangulation of data, as described under the section of credibility, (b) member checking, also detailed under the section of credibility, (c) clarification of research bias, and (d) the presentation of discrepant findings. As previously discussed in Chapter 1, I bring victimization bias to this research, having been personally exposed to criminal behavior. However, my exposure has been that of a direct victim, and not of a family member, whose loved one committed a crime and subsequently became entangled within the criminal justice system; and while I related to the emotional terms the participants used to describe their earliest connection with victimization, I did not coax or encourage terms to describe their feelings or emotions during the interviews. Finally, while it may be advantageous for researchers to seek supporting evidence to promote research questions or hypotheses, not all of the participants in this study provided this data. In the following results section, discrepant data are presented, as these individual's perspectives provide additional insight for possible future discovery, beyond the focus of this investigation.

## **Results**

The semistructured interview questions aimed to understand the lived experiences of offender families, and the phenomena of emotional trauma through their victimization and their anticipated role in the offender's reintegration. The first research question specifically addressed the personal meaning of victimization and resulting emotional trauma, with subquestions directed at the following deeper elements of victimization and trauma: (a) understanding the emotional experience from the point of discovery of the criminal offense throughout the criminal proceedings and sentencing, (b) exploring physical reactions these family members experienced throughout the process, (c) searching for the impact of the offense on the family members' relationship with friends/neighbors/other family members/the larger community, and (d) gaining insight into coping mechanisms employed by the family member.

In addition to basic demographics of the study's participants, during the face-to-face interview, each family member was first asked to provide some additional background data on their relationship to the offender, as well as demographic information on the offender, which illuminated a broader understanding into some of the family member's responses. The significance of inquiring into the familial relationship, as well as information on the offender, was to explore if any patterns developed of how the family members responded to relationship questions and the types of crimes or frequency of criminal behavior by the offender. For example, had parents responded negatively about their hope for reintegration, this response may be relevant if the offender had committed many offenses. While some connections remained speculative, and were

beyond the scope of this project, a broader understanding of the family dynamics is critical to understanding family members' victimization. Results are first introduced with study participant demographics, followed by offender demographics.

### **Participant Demographics**

Of the 13 participants, only one male volunteered to be a part of the study. The majority of the participants (69%) were between the ages of 40 and 75, and self-identified as either a parent or grandparent of the offender, with the four remaining participants self-identifying as either a married or an engaged partner to the offender, and being of the ages between 18 and 40. Sixty-nine percent of the participants were Caucasian (9), two identified as Hispanic, and two described themselves as Black, preferring that designation over African-American. The majority of participants (9) described themselves as having a strong religious affiliation, with three claiming a moderate affiliation, and one identified as an atheist. No questions were asked as to which religious affiliation they belong.

As the family's ability to communicate with the offender was identified as a critical construct in maintaining a relationship and working toward reintegration (Naser & Visher, 2006), distance traveled to see the offender and time spent on the telephone with them was asked of each participant. Four participants (31%) traveled 40-82 miles, one way, to see their loved one; an additional four participants (31%) traveled 102-198 miles, one way, while five participants (38%) traveled anywhere from 221 miles to 604 miles, one way, to spend four hours over two days with their family member. Telephone conversations, initiated only by the offender, were restricted by (a) access to funds in their Securus telephone account, and (b) their security level. Under these parameters, nine



participants (69%) reported that they spoke with their loved one a maximum of three times per week, and four participants (31%) had almost daily conversations with their family member.

### **Offender Demographics**

All offenders, referenced in this study, were identified as male by their participant family member, and while 13 individuals participated in the study, 14 offenders were discussed, as one participant had one set of twin male sons, who were both (repeat) offenders. At the time of the participants' interview, eight of the offenders (57%) were between the ages of 18 and 30, four ranged from 31-44, and two were 45 and older. While many of the offenders' criminal behaviors were connected to substance use, none of the offenders were serving time, specifically for drug-related charges. Fifty-seven percent, or eight of the offenders were convicted of a violent offense, three were serving time for property crimes, and three were accused of sexual offenses. Eight (57%) of the offenders were serving sentences as first-time offenders, while 43% (6) had previously served time in either a juvenile, county or state institution, and the participants identified them as multiple-offenders. The three males serving time as sexual offenders were all first-time offenders, while the violent and property crime offenders were made up of both first-time and repeat offenders. Finally, at the time of the interviews, the offenders had already been serving time, anywhere from six months to 15 years, with the average of six years.

### **Personal Meaning of Victimization and Trauma**

Following the questions on offender demographics and background, the second set of interview questions aimed to explore the participant's level of victimization awareness and identification, including their emotional reaction to the process of the offender's criminal behavior, from discovery of the offense and throughout the judicial process and post-sentencing. This set of questions also inquired into the participants' relationship with the offender, physical reactions, financial impact, repercussions to other relationships, and finally their personal meaning of whether or not they felt victimized.

**Prior experience of victimization.** To begin the exploration into their sense of victimization, I asked the participants to reflect back on a time when they felt victimized by any event; done so, to encourage them to reflect broadly on emotional turmoil and think in terms of expressions related to those events, criminal or otherwise. Six of the participants (A01, A03, A05, A10, A11, and A14) provided details of the events that precipitated their descriptions of victimization; however, I did not request that they explore these events specifically. Participants B01 and A15 could not recall any prior experience of victimization; yet, the remaining 11 participants articulated 38 unique descriptors to describe their perceptions of prior victimization and trauma. The terms "angry" and "helpless" were used most often, while the remaining terms were clustered under collective synonyms for a final compilation of seven primary emotional themes of the participants' perceptions of victimization and trauma, as displayed below in Table 1.

Table 1

#### *Participant Descriptions of Prior Experience of Victimization*

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Sadness	Self-contempt/ Shame	Loss	Pain	Anger	Helplessness	Fear
Depression	Embarrassed	Loss	Indescribable pain	Angry	Disbelief	Afraid
Devastated	Stupid	Isolated	Sick		Helpless	Scared
Sad	Valueless	Alone	Physical Pain		Trapped	Panicky
Unheard	Ashamed	Abandoned	Abused		No control	
Unloved	Self-harming		Hurt		Paranoid	
Unworthy	Self-destructive		Violated		Frustrating	
	No confidence					
	Insecure					
	Humiliated					
	Unimportant					

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**Relationship to the offender prior to discovery.** While this relational aspect may appear superfluous, considering the proximal familial relationship each participant has with the offender, the emotional connection may vary between family members, and may impact their emotional response to discovery of the offense and outlook on reintegration; therefore, each participant was asked to describe their relationship with the offender. When asked to describe their relationship, five participants responded “close”, and one responded “very good”, necessitating the anticipated follow-up question: “How would you describe that definition?” After several minutes of reflection, all participants developed insightful perspectives on their history, communication styles and relationship

patterns with their loved one. From this question, participants' responses assembled under three relational themes: codependency, interdependency, developing.

***Codependency.*** Each of the six participants, whose responses fall into this category, are mothers of incarcerated sons. Participants A02 and A05 referred to their sons as a "Momma's boy"; participant A03 admitted, "...I believe there is a huge amount of codependency in our relationship." Additionally, each of the six participants described codependent behaviors and poor boundaries in their relationships with their sons prior to discovery of the offense. A08 described her sons as victims of their environment and of "past decisions made by authorities that influenced their lives", while also minimizing the sons' past undetected criminal behaviors (burglarizing and gang-related drug activity) and admitting to her own willingness not to report them to the authorities, stating her "fear that they're going to get caught." Participant A14 recognized that her relationship with her children was all she had after she divorced her husband, and that she "felt like I needed to give them so much more."

***Interdependency.*** Three participants' responses about their relationship fell into what could be called interdependent, or where the family member and offender share open and safe communication, trust and have firm but flexible boundaries. Participant B01 described his relationship with his son as "excellent, up until he got into trouble", respected curfew, maintained an open and honest communication, and "lived right here in front of us" but remained independent. Participant A11 helped raise her grandson after the death of his father and debilitating injury to his mother, encouraged open communication from all family members, sought grief counseling after his father's death,

and helped raise him with the support of the Church. Participant A16 admitted that “there was some distance in his teenage years”, but she understood him better than the rest of the family, because they both shared the same energy level and the “challenges” that come with it. Additionally, she shared with him the importance that “education and respect goes together”, which helped set his goals on attending college.

***Developing.*** The four participants in this category each verbalized a young and developing relationship with the offender. Both A07 and A13 met their partners, while each was serving time for crimes they committed years before. A07’s fiancée had already been serving 18 years of a 75-year sentence, and A13 met her husband after he had served 15 years of his 80-year sentence. Both stated that their relationships to the offenders began as friendships – each providing ministry and pen-pal support to inmates within the Texas Department of Corrections system. A13 stated, “Initially, obviously I didn’t go into this thinking I was going to fall for this guy. Who does that?” A07 reported that her communication with her fiancée is open, honest and future-focused, even discussing the need for therapy to learn more about each other, stating that therapy is “not only when you think you have like an issue, therapy is also a process that you need to be proactive”.

Both participants A01 and A10 knew the offenders at an earlier age, but were not romantically involved with them until only a couple of years prior to their incarceration, when the relationships were developing. They both expressed challenges with their relationship to the offender, with A10 describing her relationship as “a rocky road” and “a roller-coaster”, and A01 recalling concerns surrounding her husband’s mental health

disorder. A01 admitted, however, that incarceration is helping to “deepen our communication levels and skills”.

**Emotional reaction following discovery and throughout process.** Under the backdrop of the participants’ prior feelings of victimization, followed by the exploration into their relationship with the offender, the interviews moved into the examination of their perceived emotions related to discovery of the offense and throughout their involvement with the judicial process, as a means of addressing Research Question 1, Subquestion 1. It was important, at this point in the interview process, that I did not ask the participants if they felt victimized in any way, either by their loved one’s behavior or by the process, as I aimed to have their descriptions arise organically from their own recollections of how they discovered the criminal offense and advanced through the judicial process with the offender.

Eight participants did not use the word “victim” in relation to themselves or the offender, but only in reference to the direct victim of the offender’s crime; however, they used 55 unique terms describing victimization within their responses, as recorded in Table 2. Participant A15 used the term “victim”, relating to her son stating, “I can’t even imagine an 18-year-old trying to deal with jail, the county jail. And facing up to the guilt of what he had done. He’s a victim.” The remaining four participants applied the term “victim” to themselves, three identifying themselves as victims of the system, including A16, A14 and A08. A02 was the only participant who applied the term to her own victimization.

A16 – “I actually feel more victimized this time than then, which that should have been a very shameful time. ...But my son, wow, the problem with my son's case, I mean my son's case was not that he was going to prison, but that they were sending him away purposefully, with seems like no care, or no thought for, as they would say, and I'm quoting them, ‘the better half of their life’.”

A14 – “I felt like I was a victim, and I even told the district attorney this. I said ‘I’m a victim too, as far as I feel victimized for what you all are doing to my son.’

A08 – “Do I feel victimized? Only sometimes, because the treatment. I have to say the Estelle Unit is okay. It’s the Pack Unit that’s awful.”

A02 – “But that and, a lot of times I feel the victim of my son’s decisions.”

Where descriptions of “pain” were detailed in events related to participants’ prior experiences with victimization, these examples were replaced by terms expressing a “sense of calm” or “relief” upon discovery, as disclosed by A03 when she explained “...because when he’s in prison, things are easier.”, and later added, “I have lived for a long time thinking that I will have these fantasies about how I will answer the door when the officers tell me my son is dead. So every time he got locked up, I thought ‘phew, that was a reprieve’. Participant A08 characterized this emotional relief as knowing “...where they are. You know they’re sober, and you know they can’t get into any more trouble, so there’s a sense of relief.”

Additionally, participants’ descriptions began to represent deep confusion and disorganization within the process from discovery through incarceration, necessitating a new emotional theme, quite disparate from emotions experienced in earlier incidents of

victimization, which is labeled in Table 2 as “Chaos/Stress”. Participant A05 recounted her experiences as “the whole process was a very unnerving and devastating. The attorneys don't really tell you everything. They just tell you what you need to know to get through the process. And sometimes, when you learn something, and maybe how you could have handled something differently during the process, it's too late, you're stuck with whatever judgment.” Analogous descriptions of confusion and resulting stress, included in this category, were used by participants 20 times.

While the terms “angry” and “helpless” were predominantly stated in prior occurrences of victimization, the descriptors “fear” and “loss”, and their related synonyms, were used most often by participants in their recollections of current victimization, upwards of 20 times each. Participant B01 described his fearful prophecy after the discovery as knowing “...that things are about to change for the worst.” “Loss”, as reported by the participants, ranged from losing the primary breadwinner of the family (A01) to the profound sense of loss after being “robbed of my husband, by a broken system” (A10).

When asked to describe their emotions throughout the judicial process, terms identified under the heading of Chaos/Stress in Table 2 were identified most often. Sentencing was singled out by nine of the 13 participants as the most traumatic stage throughout the entire judicial process, creating the deepest sense of loss, pain and sadness. Two of the participants did not know their husbands at the time of sentencing; therefore, this stage was reported to be the most traumatic by 82% of the participants. Participant A16 recalled her son’s sentencing in the following manner:



We were like ‘Wait minute, what did she say? 30?’ Because our attorney was saying five years maybe. And she said 30. And I tried to walk out because they wanted us to be quiet, so I tried to walk out. And my husband was like ‘Sit down. Sit down. Just sit down.’ And I already knew that I was about to pass out, that’s why I was trying to go out and breathe. And he wouldn’t let me do it, so as I was going out, I was trying to say ‘Just let me go.’ It was weird, it was strange. But I cried like I’ve never cried before. It disturbed everybody, the courtroom, everybody, the prosecutor, the judge, my attorney, everybody was disturbed, because I cried from a place I’ve never cried before. And even when I heard it, it was almost like it wasn’t a body crying, it was a soul crying, a spirit, and it disturbed them so bad that they decided ‘We’re going to go out the other door. We can’t walk past her’.

Table 2

*Participant Descriptions of Emotions Related to the Discovery of the Crime and the Judicial Process*

<b>Sadness</b>	<b>Self-contempt/ Shame</b>	<b>Loss</b>	<b>Calm/ Relief</b>	<b>Anger</b>	<b>Helpless</b>	<b>Fear</b>	<b>Chaos/ Stress</b>
Depression	Shame	Single	Relief	Angry	Disbelief	Afraid	Confusion
Devastated	Guilt	Isolated	Strength	Railroaded	Helpless	Scared	Seeking stability
Sad	Stigma	Alone		Sick of it	Seeking protection	Panicky	Chaos
Struggling	Embarrassed	Abandoned		Betrayed	No control	Anxiety of unknown	Shock
Despair	No confidence	Robbed			Desperate	Nightmare	Roller coaster

Lonely	Manipulated	Absent	Worry	Stressful
Mourning	Codependent		Takes your breath away	Surprised
Grieved	Insecure		Freaked out	Frustration
Constant crying			Terrified	Blur
				“like zombies”

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### **Physical reaction following discovery and throughout process.** Research

Question 1, Subquestion 2 sought to investigate the participants' physical reactions from the time of discovery until the recording of the interview. Research in victimology has consistently demonstrated that acute and chronic stress leaves individuals at risk for physical maladies and chronic pain (Babbel, 2010; Prossin, Koch, Campbell, Barichello, Zalcman, & Zubieta, 2016), and this question plays an important role in the overall mental health and coping mechanisms of victims. The most commonly reported physical reactions included: frequent crying (69%), sleep disturbance/frequent insomnia (54%), anxiety/depression (31%), “aging” (31%). Three participants detailed their struggles with significant weight loss and decreased appetite; two participants reported increased incidents of migraines; two mentioned elevated heart rates for over one year; two indicated they experienced increased pain, and both attributed this symptom to their overall “stress”; finally, three of the females, whose loved one has never before been incarcerated, stated that they “never really had any physical reactions”, but admitted to seeking therapy, either during the judicial process or thereafter. None of the participants admitted to self-medicating, either through alcohol or other substances; however, four stated that they reinitiated the use of prescribed antidepressants/anxiolytics, and drank

“occasionally”. Throughout the recording of the interviews, five of the parents, of both first-time and multiple offenders, cried openly.

**Financial concerns following discovery and throughout process.** Seventy-seven percent (10) of the study’s respondents described the significant financial burden the criminal process and incarceration placed upon their already-stretched economic situation. Of these 10 participants, five specifically blamed the financial burden of travel on their decreased visits to their loved one. Both participants B01 and A11 have “quit counting” the amount of money they have spent on legal fees, commissary, the offender’s child support payments, educational programs, and telephone expenses. Child care became an increased responsibility, on both wives and grandparents, with the loss of the offender’s financial contribution. Regardless of the amount spent, which none of the participants could define, a common theme developed from each of the participants’ accounts, and that was that they would do “what it takes” (A11) and “make it work” (A10) to keep their loved-one happy while they worked to get them out of prison. Participant A08, mother of sons with multiple offenses, detailed her repeated attempts at financial boundary-setting:

Because it was getting out of hand, all the money, \$200, \$500, I don't know how many hundreds, it ended up being at least over a thousand dollars bailing these kids out, for one thing or another. And I just told him, I warned them, actually the only reason I remember now and the only reason why I was bailing them out is so that they could hold on to their jobs. That's why I was bailing them out.

Three participants, two related to first-time offenders, noted that they have not been adversely financially impacted. Participant A05 specified that (they) “would rather be putting the money that we’re helping him, toward different ways to helping, but it hasn’t been a detriment or anything like that. Financially, it hasn’t hurt us.” Even though she was able to contribute more to her husband’s living situation, participant A13 established stricter financial boundaries, stating that her “other responsibilities (that) are higher priority financially”. She referenced his need to understand and anticipate the financial expectations of the family upon his reentry.

**Repercussions to other relationships.** Research Question 1, Subquestion 2 aimed to gain insight into participants’ relationships, beyond that of the offender, after the point of discovery. Three themes resulted from this discussion: no impact, limited disconnection, strengthened relationships.

**No impact.** Seven participants noted that their relationships with other family members, friends, neighbors and the larger community has not altered since the discovery; however, Participants 07 and A13, who married the offender during his incarceration, have intentionally limited their discussions about him to others. As A13 stated, “Most people don’t even know that I’m married, even though I wear...I don’t talk about it.” Most of the participants ascribing to this theme made statements about their intentionally private lifestyles, which made admission about the offender’s actions minimal in scope. Participant A05 disclosed that “Because we’re not around much, we aren’t as social in the community.”

**Limited disconnection.** The remaining six participants reflected on how the

discovery impacted their relationships, within the larger community, their families and among friends. A02 recalled that her son's crime resulted in both very public criminal and civil litigation, which left her at odds with several people within the community, especially with the victim's family, whom she frequently encountered. While admitting that the discovery has impacted the community and her friendships, she revealed "Right now, I could care less what they think. Really. I'm just beyond that. I really don't care what they think." Similarly, Participant A03 has endured public scrutiny from individuals impacted by her son's behavior, which also resulted in civil litigation, leaving her "embarrassed to be put in that position because that's not me. I am very community oriented. I do a lot of volunteer work, I always have. So I felt like it sort of put me in a position where it went against my core values."

Other participants' relationships disconnected for a number of reasons. Participant A08 described that her sister became estranged, while Participant A14 discussed her sister's refusal to provide help, due to the violent nature of the crime, and the son's connection to a co-conspirator who had not yet been arrested. Participant A15 witnessed the most dramatic family separation, with the older sibling detaching completely, the brother shutting off communication with the offender and limiting communication with the parents, and the other sister (the mother of the victim) separating because of the offense and her guilt for reporting. A10, while her family remained supportive, identified that she "lost friendships over it, because they have been very attacking, and they say terrible things about him."

***Strengthened relationships.*** Though not the majority of findings, four

participants detailed the strengthening of their relationship within their religious community, even when others had disconnected. Participant A10 recounted the loss of friends over her husband's behavior, but joyfully spoke that, "in other ways, it brought me closer to people that I wasn't close to before. In our church, because I've been pretty open about this (her husband's offense), I've developed a lot of relationships that I didn't have before." A15 proudly declared that her "church family is always available when I need them", remaining a "constant" for her. Both Participants A10 and A16, while they commented that they had not lost familial or community relationships, both stated that their relationships within The Church had strengthened. A16 prayed about needing a new connection within a spiritual community and "hearing": "Go to church with (M) and I was excited. She wants you there. Because I would've went [sic] before, but I didn't want to push her away. She said she wants me there, but then she's emotional, she's getting better though. But it was the right time, so I'm there now."

**Coping mechanisms and support.** Three primary themes developed from Research Question 1, Subquestion 4, which asked participants about their coping mechanisms during the time of absence from their loved one: reliance on external sources, spirituality and self-advocacy. Five participants spoke of only one external source as their influence of coping; seven referenced the use of two coping sources, and only one remarked on her reliance of three of the coping themes. The participants' responses pointed to the level of diverse means by which they chose to function without their family member. Every participant stated descriptors of "missing" or "loneliness" when asked about coping with the loss of their loved one, and eleven of the participants

required prompting to describe how they sought to manage the loss.

***Reliance on external sources.*** The vast majority of participants (85%) noted the reliance on external sources for managing their “sense of loss” or “loneliness”. While all 13 individuals came to the study as a referral through TIFA, 11 of the participants acknowledged the support group directly as a source of both comfort and information.

Participant A10

...developed friendships with people through TIFA that I never would have crossed paths with normally. It's made me much more empathetic and compassionate towards people, because until you get through this, you have no idea what the system is like, and how tough on crime sounds great when you've never had to deal with those actual policies and what they do to people, families.

A02 expressed her appreciation for TIFA as: “we’re all in the same boat...we can speak the same language; they don’t look down on me. A14 described the assistance TIFA provided in helping her find college education for her son during his incarceration, and A16 explained that her attendance at TIFA meetings provided her details on the parole process and the Criminal Justice Committee hearings. During this section of the interview, three participants disclosed that they started (A08 and A01) support ministries for offender families, or were planning on starting a support group (A03), as it was her contention that a “real gap and a need” exists for children of offenders.

Others identified additional external sources of solace and support, including parents, Prison Wives Association (A07), and “Facebook groups, there's also the typical group, and there’s other Christian support groups for those that have incarcerated loved

ones” (A01). Several participants sought therapy throughout the process as a means to seek reassurance, and while A03 discovered that “my therapist has been a good support system...”, “My husband is not a good source for that.” While three participants specified their ability to discuss their family situations with work friends, four participants sought work as a means to “stay busy” and “escape”, as described by participant A13:

I just keep really busy. I work full-time, I’m obviously raising two crazy kids, and my dad. And I’m a full-time master’s student. I do mystery shopping on the side, that’s what I call my side hustle. And I do a lot of ministry work. And that’s how I deal with it. My husband gets really frustrated with me sometimes because he feels like I’m too busy. But it’s how I deal. If I sat around here and moped about the fact ‘Oh, I don’t have my husband here,’ that’s depressing. I don’t have time for that. And so I just really keep busy.

Though highly sensitive, the topic of infidelity was discussed as a coping mechanism for the four female married or engaged participants. One participant did admit to having a romantic relationship outside of her marriage, one that resulted in the birth of a child, but they remained married. A13 detailed her struggles:

So, there was a time where I just got tired, I was just tired. And so, I essentially had, it ended up being a three-month fling with a guy. And when I found out, I had already kind of ended things with the guy, and had already kind of just kind of let that go, and was trying to kind of work on things. But I was always really honest with my husband, and I think that was key in all of this, was my honesty



with him. He didn't like it, and he really fought it tooth and nail. But I was going to do what I wanted to do, and I was just tired of being lonely.

***Spirituality.*** Seven participants identified their church, efforts in ministry, and faith in God as their primary coping mechanism, of which two named spirituality as their only means of grief management. A11 serves as a pastor to her church, ministers in the local jails, and maintained that her "...therapy is my Bible, my Jesus." Participant A02, while visibly caressing her large cross around her neck, expressed her sense of calm to "get through stuff like this" by having

...firmly learned that I can pray through all this, and I can ask for God. . . but until I completely give it all to God. . . I said it a lot, 'God will take care of him.' I said it a lot, but I only meant it in my heart, the Lord knew it, once or twice. And then I found peace, that's where I had peace.

Participant A16 resonated similar sentiments when she reflected on her need for spiritual support:

...the Bible tells you to meditate on His word. But what it does is, when I do that, I pray, I'm asking God to show me something. And when he shows me things, it's like oh, 'it doesn't seem like I'm without help'. I feel like I have help now for that situation. I know how to conquer it. It may be small situations, it may not be the whole scenario that he has, but those situations. That's what I need.

***Self-advocacy.*** Four participants discussed their coping in terms of behaviors they initiated for their own self-improvement. Participant A01, a nursing and psychology student stated that she has, "...studied CBT [cognitive behavioral therapy], and I've

studied DBT [dialectical behavioral therapy], and I've studied a lot of other ways to cope.” Additionally, A01 spent considerable time researching bipolar disorders to accept her husband’s condition, in an effort to better understand why he acted the way he did, that led to his incarceration. Participant A08 volunteered in her screening interview that her extensive use of meditation has limited her stress and helped calm her through the judicial process. Both participants A03 and A10 identified their personal need to set boundaries as a process of developing inner strength through their loved one’s incarceration. A03 explained the evolution of her boundary development as:

I have felt that a long time, and usually because of, for instance, having a new husband in the last 10 years. Him walking into this mess. That’s all I can say, mess. That’s a strain for us. So, many times I felt like I had to choose between helping my son or doing what he, what my husband thought was the right thing to do. And my son would call me out on it, he said ‘Look, doesn’t he know that this is J and L show [names redacted]?’ ‘You and I are first.’ And I have explained to him and shown him I think in my actions that it’s not that way anymore. ‘You’re a grown man’.

**Participant comparisons on victimization and trauma.** To discover the personal meaning of victimization and resulting emotional trauma, the purpose of Research Question 1, each participant was asked a final question before moving into their perceptions of reentry and reintegration. I asked each participant to describe any similarities between their earliest experiences of victimization and trauma and those feelings associated with the discovery and criminal justice process surrounding their

loved one's criminal behavior. Three themes resulted: Victims of the system, Recipients of stigma, and No recognition of victimization. While three themes arose from the comparison between the participant's earliest understanding of victimization and the experiences with their loved one's criminal behavior, a larger theme of system blaming was evident with every participant. This is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5.

***Victims of the system.*** Participant A16 succinctly articulated the thoughts of 85% (11) of the participants and their verbalized grievances with the judicial system when she described her sense of victimization:

I actually feel more victimized this time than then, which that should have been a very shameful time. Well, I mean that that should have been, but for some reason this just seems worse than anything I've ever experienced in my life. Worse than losing my mother and my father, and my husband. ...But dying naturally is something more susceptible to the spirit than someone taking them. But my son, wow, the problem with my son's case, I mean my son's case was not that he was going to prison, but that they were sending him away purposefully, with seems like no care, or no thought... Completely betrayed. I lost all faith, I have no faith, no faith in the justice system.

Participant A14 elaborated on her sense of betrayal "...by the detectives. I felt betrayed by the courts. [My daughter] died for her country that treats their prisoners worse than the countries we fought against." Participant A10 described her "frustration" as the "system" has "no humanity". Others drew comparisons on past feelings of "embarrassment" and the treatment they received during the process, such as A02, when she elaborated: "... in

a lot of situations we're treated as criminals, just like he is, like when we visit the jails."

A03 shared similar sentiments when she explained: "...visit him twice a week, and it takes me hours, and they treat me like I'm crap. I'm the criminal, and I'm not, I'm just there to support my son."

Participant A08 used the adjectives "abandoned", "valueless" and "unimportant" to describe her earliest feelings of victimization, and when asked about her current sense of victimization, the term "angry" was used eight times, as she described her feelings toward the "system": "Angry. I was angry, yeah man. Yes, I was angry and I'm still angry at the judge, not angry at the boys. Not much. I'm angry, I'm most angry at the judge. I'm most angry at the psychologist..." Similarly, A05 consistently expressed feelings of frustration, both in her prior and current states of victimization "because the system really doesn't separate different degrees. They're all thrown in the same boat and it doesn't even matter, so even if you're a true predator or not, you're treated exactly the same."

Participants B01 and A15, who could not recall any prior experience of victimization at the beginning of the interviews, both expressed their frustrations with the system, as B01 explained, "...especially in this country, you don't necessarily have to be guilty to go to prison." A15 described her current sense of victimization as "being robbed of my son" by a system that will "continue to build prisons, and incarcerate people and ruining lives, not just the life of the perpetrator, but the lives of the family members."

Both participants A07 and A13 presented unique positions on victimization by the system, as they are both partners of the offenders, meeting their loved one after he was incarcerated. While they both expressed feelings of prior victimization with terms such as

“violated”, “unloved”, “un-empowered” and “unworthy”, neither was able to draw a comparison between those earlier experiences and the events associated with their loved one’s incarceration. They both communicated that while their situation is “lonely”, they fight for their loved one’s freedom from an unjust system. A07 stated that she is fighting for her fiancé, who is “serving time for a wrongful conviction. ....in a place that strips so much from people every day...My fight is to change the culture of the agency. It’s about changing the standards for the people that they employ.” A13 recalled that several of her family members had been incarcerated but stated, “I also believe that there are a lot of good people in prison, who maybe that [sic] made bad mistakes. And so not everybody, I don’t believe that everybody deserves to stay there forever.” Additionally, she argued that the system is unjust, because her husband is serving an 80-year sentence, “where the average [for murder] is 15-25.”

***Recipients of stigma.*** Two participants recalled similar descriptors they used when asked about earlier memories of victimization, such as “frustrated”, “sad”, and “shame”, which drew the comparison of being stigmatized, as Participant A02 recalled when she revealed “with the atmosphere that nowadays, it’s not popular at all, around here anyway, to be any way, shape or form not pro-law enforcement, or pro-Trump, or pro-conservative. Most people say ‘Well, you know, he shouldn’t have done what he did to get in there.’ Participant A01 likened her earliest memory of shame to the “stigma attached to those that are incarcerated. So there’s a lot of that. It’s not something that you go to mommy’s groups, and you say ‘Oh hey, my husband works out here’, ‘My husband’s a pilot.’ ...technically I’m a single parent, because he’s not here.”

*No recognition of victimization.* Only one participant was unable to make a connection with previous feelings of victimization and trauma. A11 commented that her previous traumatic experiences related to death and the “deep and painful loss of family” and “mourning.” When her grandson was arrested and subsequently incarcerated, she made the conscious decision “to turn it around from a funeral mentality,” never to take on feelings of “loss,” “sadness” or “mourning.” She stated that she tells everyone “Stinking thinking will get you nowhere. It will shut you off.”, and then immediately commented that “I’m excited to see what God has up ahead.”

### **Personal Definition of Reintegration Role and Responsibility**

Research Question 2 delved into understanding what roles the offender’s family members plan to perform and if they feel responsible for their loved one’s successful reentry and reintegration. Research Question 2 was supported by several questions pertaining to their anticipated roles, their need for support, including tools they may require, and their perceptions on participation in an RJ process. Irrespective of the participants’ identified role and responsibility level in the offender’s reentry, one theme resonated clearly, and that was the offender would have their family member’s unwavering support. This is reviewed in greater depth in Chapter 5.

Though the question about a specific reentry plan for the offender was not asked during the interview, not a single participant mentioned the development of a reentry plan. On three occasions, parents referenced their involvement with developing a parole packet, and when probed about the action plans within the packet, no participants provided details. This theme is also be discussed in Chapter 5.

**Identification of roles and responsibility.** Reentry roles fall into providing emotional or instrumental support. The participants split almost evenly between those who would support their loved one with both roles, and those who would likely only provide emotional support. No significant differences emerged from the participant and offender demographics – the partners of offenders were in both groups, parents were in both categories, religious identification was evenly split, and offender criminal acts were also evenly divided. The average age of the family members choosing both roles was 47, and the average age of those choosing to provide emotional support was 60. The question of responsibility for the offender's successful reentry drew very few responses, and only six participants answered the question directly, which separated into two themes: *responsible for everything* and *responsible for nothing*.

**Shared roles of support.** Seven participants reported that they would provide both emotional and instrumental support to their family member; however, none provided information on how long they would be willing to continue their instrumental support. Only one participant indicated that the offender would be responsible for paying the family back for their financial expenses. A05, mother of the offender stated:

Well, he's going to come out and work with us. He is going to, because commissary takes out 10 percent of everything I put in, it pays for his court fees. Well, it pays for everything but the actual court-appointed attorney - THAT he has to pay for when he comes out. He's going to be expected to work all that off, he's going to have to work like he should have been. So it's offering the ability to do that, the ability, not a handout but the ability to get off the crutches and stand

on his own two feet as a good person of society, that's not a menace to society but a contributor.

Housing and assistance with securing employment were identified as the primary sources of instrumental support. Participants A14 and A03, mothers of the offender, reported that either an entire house or a floor of the family home would be made available upon their son's reentry. The two women, who met their partner in prison (A07 and A13) stated that they "must" provide all instrumental support; because, as A13 made clear:

...he's never seen an iPhone, he had a cell phone but it was one of those flip phones, and he doesn't know that everything's done by debit card now. I imagine I'll have to show him how to pump gas. Some of the minute things like that. I think that initially he'll be a financial burden to some degree.

A03 became noticeably upset during this portion of the interview, especially when she began talking about housing for her son. While she stated that her son will need "stable" housing for a minimum of six months, she does not have the full support of her husband, the offender's step-father. She also recalled that the previous time he was paroled, her son "destroyed" the house that she provided for him. While housing for her son remains her top priority for instrumental support, she reported that she feels her "role as a protector" is greater for her granddaughter, who was born since her son has been incarcerated.

For two participants, financial security resonated as the top priority for instrumental support. A10 opined that for felons, "it's almost impossible to get a job", so:



Our plan for him is for him to be self-employed, and my mother started a business and he is going to work with her as a contractor and that kind of thing. So we already know what the landscape looks like so we're just going to plan around it.

Finally, A16 asserted that while her son has aspirations at completing his degree while incarcerated, and he wants to get a job on his own, she knows she will be “financially helping him, of course.”

***Emotional support.*** Six participants described their role in terms of providing emotional support for the offender's reentry, adding that their loved one has a home and a job to which he will return. Participant A01, wife of the offender, commented that her role is to “just let him know that it's not something that he has to do alone”; however, she noted that her biggest concern is the environment may “trigger” what she believes may be PTSD. Participant A02 remarked that she “will be his mental support. I will be his encouragement. It's very hard, because a lot of times I'm giving him encouragement and I'm not encouraged.” A11 observed that she raised the offender in a “grandma/mother” role and sought to do everything for him, because of the trauma he experienced in his life, but tells him now that she is his spiritual support and that “God has a different plan. This is why you are here.”

***Responsible for everything.*** Three participants indicated that they will be solely responsible for the offender's successful reintegration, at least until such a time when they can “get on their feet” (A11). As Participant A11, the wife of one offender, stated, “I don't want to call it ‘mother henning’, but I think that's really what it's going to be initially,” recalling that her husband has already been incarcerated 27 years of an 80 year

sentence, and was 18 when he was convicted. Participant A11 remarked that she feels responsible for his reentry “because this season in his life is still not over. ...my priority is to get him back home with his son.” Participant A15, the mother of a sexual offender, noted that a sexual offender’s reentry “life is really difficult,” and has committed to her son and other sexual offenders that her “job will be to make sure these men keep parole, every single thing that parole asks them to do, so that they can succeed and not go back.”

***Responsible for nothing.*** The three participants, who responded to this question, hesitated but settled with stating that they felt no responsibility for their loved one’s successful reentry and reintegration. Participant A01, wife of the offender, reported that she does “not feel like I am [responsible]”, but she is “nervous about him being back home,” because another “minor mistake” could cause a “catastrophe.” Participant A05 flatly stated “I don’t know that we’re responsible at all. I don’t even know that we’re obligated. It’s just something we want to do.” Participant A02, mother of an older offender, while she initially reported that she does feel responsible for her son, “no matter how old he is,” finally landed on, “I don’t really feel responsible for it...We’re going to help him all we can, but I don’t feel responsible.”

**Additional needs for support or tools during reentry.** Many of the participants responded to this question by reiterating their earlier comments on support coming through support groups, friends, or their Church and its ministry options, but when probed about additional support tools they may require during the reentry process, three new needs surfaced. A02 and A10 emphasized their need to trust in their communities to provide employment opportunities to their family member. While Participant A02’s son

earned his GED and was employed prior to his incarceration, a felony conviction has her worried “that he’s going to be disappointed.” Participant A10 echoed this concern when she stated, “It would be great if there were more employers that would hire felons...unless you’re willing to work in the oil field and be away from your family, it’s almost impossible to get a job.”

Four participants spoke to the need for initiating therapy upon their loved one’s return, not only for themselves, but for the offender. A11 restated her sense of urgency to ensure that her grandson get therapy as a means of addressing his “anger” and “trauma”, since “it has impacted the entire family.” Participant A01 identified the need for both she and her husband to get counseling to address “the trauma, because of some of the stuff they’ve seen...they have that PTSD syndrome when they get home.” Participant A02 also recognized that her son has never received therapy and “needs post-traumatic stress treatment when he gets home.” A07 recognized therapy as a necessary “proactive tool,” and plans to initiate therapy for both of them to understand “what happens when the ‘honeymoon’ is over.”

One participant specifically stated the need to set expectations during the reentry stage. While A03 declared several times during her interview that she and her husband do not agree on what roles they will need to take for her son’s reentry, she acknowledged that they need to outline the expectations prior to his return. She also stated that the expectations are as much for her son as they are for her, so that “I know the limits of how far I can go.” This was identified as a necessary tool for her to “set boundaries.”

**Perspectives on Restorative Justice.** The concept of RJ was asked of each

participant, aimed at evaluating their hypothetical participation within such a program, as an additional tool for understanding their commitment to the offender's reentry. The concept of RJ was first defined to each participant as a tool used in many judicial systems, aimed at restoring individual healing and community trust (Braithwaite, 1998; Gavrielides, 2011; Wenzel, Okimoto, Feather, & Platow, 2008). I explained that the process typically includes the direct victim, key community members and the offender (Bazemore, 1998), and more recently, family members of the offender (Metze, Abma, & Kwekkeboom, 2015; Zehr, 2015). Once I outlined the concept for each participant, I asked, "Hypothetically, if part of the terms of release for your loved one included meeting with members of the community and even the victim of the crime, how do you see yourself participating in this process?" The participants' resoundingly demonstrated their support for and desired inclusion within such a process. This theme is discussed in greater depth in Chapter 5.

Eleven (85%) of the participants quickly and adamantly responded that they would be willing to participate. One participant, the mother of a sex offender, could not commit her interest, especially as it pertained to her son, commenting only, "I would if I needed to, but I don't see the point in that." One additional participant, the father of a sex offender, hesitated and waited a few seconds before responding, finally concluding: "There needs to be something done to keep some of these people from ever going to prison to start with."

Participant A08 reported that she would "absolutely" participate, but doubted "that it would be well-received where we live. They're extremely punitive; they're very

to the right, they're all Trump people; they believe in punishment." Participant A03 stated that she "definitely" would participate, but added that "it would be difficult. It would be worse to face people you're close to. I think family would be almost worse, because I would expect my family to be more critical of him." Participant A10 agreed that she would participate, especially if it meant that it kept her husband from repeating his criminal behavior, "...because if you have to look your victim in the eye, and you have to put a human being behind what you're doing, I feel it would really impact people more..." Participant A14 readily responded that she would participate in such a process, and added that her son had attempted to speak to the victim's family, because "he was sickened by what happened," but has not yet been able to contact them. Participant A15 emphatically said that she would "absolutely participate, because without restoration, you can't have true justice, can you?"

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I reviewed the process of participant recruitment, demographics of both the participants, and to a lesser degree, the offenders, the method of data collection, and the process for data analysis. The study met the four levels of evidence for trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Most importantly, I reported the results from the qualitative semistructured interview of 13 offender family members, who recalled their lived experiences from the point of discovery of their loved one's crime through the time of incarceration, including their personal coping mechanisms and their ensuing relationships with friends, neighbors, other family members and their larger community. In addition to revealing their feelings

and emotions during this period of time, each participant reflected on their future roles and responsibilities with their loved one's eventual reentry and community reintegration, including their perspective on RJ.

Research Question 1 addressed the participants' personal meaning of victimization and trauma, resulting from the offender's crime. This exploration began with the participants' review of prior experiences with victimization, and coupled those feelings with the emotions and physical reactions experienced from the point of discovery of the crime throughout the trial and sentencing process. The participants also detailed their relationships with the offender throughout the legal process. Taking into account their prior experiences of victimization, their relationship to the offender, and their emotions throughout the judicial process, the participants further explored their physical reactions, financial burden, impact to surrounding relationships and personal coping mechanisms resulting from their loved one's criminal behavior and expressed descriptors of victimization. Six overlapping definitions of victimization resulted from the comparison of the participants' earlier experience with victimization and trauma and their latter exposure: sadness, self-contempt/shame, loss, anger, helplessness, and fear. Two additional themes evolved through the participants' experience with the criminal justice process: calm/relief and chaos/stress.

Research Question 2 directed the interview toward exploring the participants' identification of their role and responsibility in the offender's reentry and reintegration process, including the hypothetical inclusion within an RJ program. This portion of the study gained insight into the participants' willingness to provide emotional or

instrumental support (or both) to the offender upon his reentry as well as understanding how responsible the family member feels for the offender's successful reintegration. The provision of support was about evenly divided between participants who would provide both emotional and instrumental and participants who would only provide emotional support. The question surrounding responsibility resulted in only six responses, split evenly between three family members accepting complete responsibility and three accepting no responsibility. While presented as a hypothetical situation, all participants were asked about their participation in an RJ process, and 11 of the 13 participants agreed they would take part.

In Chapter 5, I provide a broader interpretation of each of the results, discuss the study's limitations, provide recommendations for future research and examine implications for social change. Additionally, I explore the overarching themes discovered throughout all of the interviews, specifically (a) unwavering support, (b) minimization of criminal behavior, (c) system blaming, and (d) the relationship between having a reentry plan and the clear expectations of roles and responsibilities.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

### **Introduction**

The purpose for this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the level of victimization and emotional trauma experienced by offender family members, irrespective of the type of crime committed by the offender. Additionally, the purpose of this study was to examine the family members' perceptions of necessary psychological support and community empathy to effectively perform their anticipated roles in the offender's reentry process, in an effort to reduce recidivism. While past research evaluated victimization and trauma, family members, unless direct victims of the offense, have been excluded from the review, and reintegration expectations have been evaluated from the perspectives of the offender and the judicial system. There remains a deficient exploration into the lived experiences of the family members--who suffer great emotional, spiritual, financial, and physical loss due to their loved one's criminal behavior--such as their perceptions of their victimization and ability to aid in the offender's reintegration.

The phenomenological methodology was most appropriate to explore multiple participants' diverse and personal experiences as a family member of a criminal offender, through the use of probing, semistructured, and open-ended questions, which allowed for rich and detailed interpretation of their lived events and impressions. Though the nature of the crimes committed differed with each family, and the resulting impact upon the participants were varied, shared meanings and themes of the events arose from the data that I collected over the extended period of time I spent with each participant.



The study advanced two primary research questions, which are listed below, each with their own supporting subquestions. Participants addressed each research question through a series of 24 interview questions, broken into three sections: (a) demographics and background, (b) personal meaning of victimization, and (c) personal definition of reintegration role and responsibility.

Research Question 1: What is the personal meaning of victimization and resulting emotional trauma, as experienced by offender family members, resulting from the offender's crime?

Subquestion 1: What emotions do offender family members experience after their loved one is arrested and throughout the trial and sentencing process?

Subquestion 2: What physical reactions do offender family members experience throughout the entire legal process?

Subquestion 3: How has the experience of becoming an offender family member affected relationships with friends/neighbors/other family members/larger community?

Subquestion 4: How do offender family members psychologically cope with the absence of their loved one?

Research Question 2: How do offender family members identify their roles in the offender's reentry and reintegration process?

Subquestion 1: What specific roles do offender family members anticipate having once their loved one reenters the community?

Subquestion 2: What sources of support do offender families require to fulfill their anticipated roles?

Thirteen individuals participated in the study, recruited from four channels with access to family members of offenders, throughout the state of Texas. Participants self-selected for engagement and met inclusion criteria, which consisted of a measure of diversity in age, race, and gender. Each individual participated in a telephone pre-screening and a face-to-face interview. I used a process known as *member checking* (Creswell, 2013, p.191) to enhance the study's credibility; whereby, I sent each transcribed interview to the individual participants for their edits and feedback. I analyzed the data after multiple readings of the transcripts and several sessions of listening to the audio-recordings, which produced themes within each research question.

Participants drew clear parallel descriptions of emotional reactions to prior incidents of victimization and trauma and their traumatic experiences with their loved one's criminal behavior. Predominant themes of emotional reactions included: sadness, self-contempt/shame, loss, anger, helplessness, and fear. Two additional emotional reactions resulted from the interviews, specifically related to the family member's experience with their loved one's criminal behavior: sense of calm/relief and chaos/stress. While those emotions described feelings associated with the family members' discovery of the criminal act and the ensuing legal processes, the majority of the participants described their "victimization" as having resulted from their perceived injustices by the criminal justice system, including the police, legal representation, and judicial authorities and the institutional staff. Two participants noted an associated stigma with having a loved one as an offender, and only one individual denied any sense of victimization.

Participants also described their victimization in terms of physical reactions, financial burdens, and affected relationships with others. Persistent crying, sleep disturbance, and anxiety/depression emerged as the primary physical reactions, while a “sense of aging” and decreased appetite followed as additional physical concerns. The majority of participants experienced consequential financial hardships, and for five of those participants, the burden impacted their ability to sustain in-person visits with their loved one. The impact of the offender’s behavior on the participants’ surrounding family, friends and larger community base created a disturbance for less than half of the participants (six), while four of the participants noted new and strengthened relationships, especially with their religious community.

Coping mechanisms that participants used to ameliorate trauma primarily depended on external sources, with the majority of participants crediting Texas Inmates Family Association (TIFA) as the support group that provided both emotional and education support. Other participants identified friends, specific family members, immersion into work, self-education on mental health, and religious organizations as their primary source for coping. Only one participant admitted to a brief extra-marital affair.

In terms of Research Question 2, participants split on the level of support they would offer their loved one upon their return, with just over half reporting they would provide both emotional and instrumental support and six reported that they would provide only emotional support. When pressed, only three participants reported that they felt responsible for the offender’s success in reintegration, while three definitively responded that they bore no responsibility in the offender’s successful reintegration. Participants

spoke to the need for additional external support while aiding in the offender's reentry, specifically through spiritual connections, friends, and therapy. Only two individuals spoke of disconnection or disruption from the larger community; however, they indicated this disconnect merited no specific support needs from the community upon the offender's reentry. The majority of participants explained that they would be willing to participate in some form of RJ if it helped their loved one understand how to reintegrate.

When I reviewed the interviews in their entirety, and not only according to the line-items of the research questions, four overarching themes consistently emerged: (a) unwavering love and emotional support for the offender, (b) minimization of their loved one's criminal behavior, (c) system blaming – from arrest through incarceration and poor treatment of family throughout, and (d) loosely defined reentry plans with no apparent alignment with the offender's goals and expectations. Family members discussed these themes throughout the entire interview, irrespective of the guided interview questions; therefore, these overarching themes will be woven throughout the interpretations of findings, as they relate to the specific research questions.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

Addressing the findings of this study must evaluate what the research questions intended to address and place the participants' results in the context of prior research. To address Research Question 1, asked participants to explore their personal meaning of victimization and resulting trauma after discovery of their loved one's crime and throughout the criminal justice proceedings. I asked this question in the context of the theoretical concept of a person, as well as the caregiving community, being trauma-

informed. Specifically, I asked participants to draw a connection between any past personal victimization and trauma with the emotional reactions produced after the discovery of their loved one's crime.

### **Research Question 1**

**Findings under the concept of being trauma-informed.** Much of what is known about trauma today comes from increased recognition of suffering caused by childhood sexual abuse, incest, violence against women, war and natural disasters (Herman, 1997; SAMHSA, 2014). Seven participants, all female, described past victimization specifically related to childhood/adult sexual and personal violence, while four participants drew parallels with other non-disclosed acts of victimization. Only two participants could not report any past feelings of victimization.

Participants used comparable terms to describe their prior incidents of victimization and trauma with their current situation with their loved one. Most notably, however, the most commonly used terms in prior victimization was “angry,” which was directed at the offender, and “helpless,” which was used to describe the participant. In post-discovery descriptions of victimization, “angry” was used to describe the participants’ emotions toward “the system,” including treatment of the participant and their family member by law enforcement and individuals throughout the judicial process and the overall perceived “fairness” of judgements towards their loved one. The commonly expressed term of “fear,” described in post-discovery depiction, was not the participants’ sense of fear for themselves, but fear for their loved one – the offender.

Terms used to describe forms of suffering of the participant (or self-suffering) were used less frequently by participants when they described victimization after the discovery. While some terms described their personal trauma, the majority of the participants reflected on how those terms described their actual sorrow and compassion for the offender. For example, the second most commonly used term, post-discovery, was “loss.” Family members would explain their loss in terms of their loved one no longer being a part of their daily family connection, and then link that feeling of loss to “the system” as being responsible for that separation.

Clear patterns of the family members’ willingness to minimize their loved one’s responsibility for their criminal behavior and blame the system for the familial disruption emerged as the most common reaction to the research question about personal meaning of victimization. For example, one participant questioned the court’s decision to sentence her son to a “stiff sentence” of 5 years for “inappropriate touching, I guess, of a step-daughter.” Another participant sharply described her “anger” as, “not angry at the boys, not much” but at the system, including judges, attorneys, the ex-husband and psychologists who, at an early age set the boys on the path toward their repetitive criminal lifestyle.

The notable connection between these findings and the concept of trauma-informed community services, is that as these participants seek additional therapy, either prior to or after the offender’s return, both the participants and community professionals must be able to draw the connection between the individual’s past and current state of victimization and resulting trauma. Effects of lifetime trauma are cumulative, and

successful integration by professionals of understanding one's past and current levels of victimization will aid the participants in their recovery, from their past victimization and current state of trauma, while guiding them to a deeper understanding of the offender's behavior and a broader appreciation (Wilson et al., 2013) of allowing their loved one to accept full responsibility for the crimes they committed. Throughout her interview, participant A03 clearly began to draw her own connection to this concept of being trauma-informed, as she spoke of her past victimization, the emotions she experienced throughout her son's repeated criminal offenses, and her desire to change how she would no longer accept responsibility for her son's behavior or be continually manipulated by him.

#### **Findings compared to past research.**

*Anger.* Past research on offender families, which has been arguably very limited, provided a base for this study that family members would place a level of their emotional response of "anger" toward the offender, especially the repeat offenders. It was expected that this study's data would demonstrate a pre-victimization "anger" directed at the participant's offender or event, and a post-discovery victimization "anger" would likewise be directed at the participant's loved one (the offender) for creating financial burdens, negative physical outcomes, and an upheaval with other family members, friends, and the larger community. This study's data, however, disconfirmed these earlier findings and assumptions, as only one participant voiced that she was "not angry at the boys, not much," even though both sons cycled through the judicial system three times before the age of 23.

In terms of the participants being trauma-informed, and even though the interview questions were delivered in such a way for a connection of pre- and post-trauma to be drawn, it is likely that the participants did not make this connection and they felt as though the events of victimization were discrete incidents. Additionally, the participants were either parents or partners of the offenders, an undeniably close familial connection that might create feelings of guilt if the participant expressed feelings of anger toward their loved one, especially to an unfamiliar researcher outside of the family unit.

***External relationships.*** Past research also pointed to courtesy stigmatization and victim blaming of offender family members (Goffman, 2009; Niemi & Young, 2016) as their relationship to the offender connects them to public disgrace and discredited status. This study, however, did not result in similar findings. While two family members pointed to a disconnection with the community after the discovery of the offender's crime, they admitted that they pulled away from the community with no factual evidence that the community had turned against them. Relatedly, four participants commented that they developed new and strengthened relationships within their religious communities, despite the members knowing about the offender's behavior. This may be due, in part to the individual's already strong religious convictions, as well as their support found within the TIFA community. This finding confirms research conducted by Ofori-Dua et al. (2015), in which some of the female participants sought support through a religious community when they felt (real or perceived) community ostracism.

***Financial and physical health.*** This study's findings did, however, confirm past research on the financial and physical impact experienced by offender family members.



While only three participants noted that the offender's behavior had not caused a significant financial burden on the family, this was not the case for the majority of participants. Most of the participants discussed their depleted savings, and they expressed a sense of living paycheck to paycheck to help provide assistance while the offender is incarcerated, either by paying for lawyers, the offender's child support payments, or prison commissary. They also verbalized a sense of guilt for having no money to continue paying the offender's bills.

The physical reactions experienced by family members mirrored past research; yet, perhaps not in the extremes that had been reported in earlier studies. A reported sense of depression was most common, expressed as frequent or continuous crying, sleep disturbances, decreased appetite, and intermittent anxiety. Most participants stated an overall decrease in their health status; however, they also noted a gradual improvement during the period of post-discovery and the interview.

***Coping.*** Asked as a means by which to gauge coping mechanisms, self-medication through substance use was denied by all participants. This was a divergent finding from much of the prior research, where substance use helped to ease the pain of loss of the family member. One of the four women in a partner relationship with the offender reported an extra-marital affair as a means of coping with her sadness and loneliness. Other studies reported similar findings, and I believe that if the current study contained a larger number of married couples, those results would increase. While a few participants expressed their reliance on internally-focused means of coping with their loss, such as through meditation and self-reflective education, the majority of participants

leaned on external sources for support, such as friends, focusing on work, their religious community and TIFA.

## **Research Question 2**

Research Question 2 explored the participants' anticipated roles and responsibilities within the offender's reentry and reintegration. I asked this question to gain an understanding of the participants' insight into what is needed for successful reentry and reintegration, including the concept of their hypothetical participation within a RJ program.

### **Findings compared to past research.**

*Optimism.* With the vast majority of past research focusing on the offender's perspective on reentry, comparison from this study's results remains challenging. However, participant responses surrounding their optimism of the offender's success upon reentry confirms research on the offenders' optimism. Both parties tend to be optimistic that the reentry and reintegration process will go smoothly, and that desistance from criminal behavior is likely (Shollenberger, 2009). Of the six repeat offenders, only Participant A03 stated that she struggles with staying optimistic about change in his behavior, as she understands that "history is a predictor of future behavior." Even so, her overall tone concerning her son's return remained hopeful. While she professed optimism of her son's successful reentry, as a first-time offender, Participant A02 believed that her son is overly optimistic about the challenges she knows he will face, especially related to securing employment, but because she "must help him," she cannot "reveal my doubts."

One consistent theme surrounding the family members' optimism was the acknowledgement that the offenders were taking positive steps during their incarceration to improve their education and employment options. Most of the family members reported that their loved one initiated participation in educational courses, and other behavioral programming, aside from the court-ordered classes. Additionally, the families expressed pride that the offender had been demonstrating a positive work ethic at their facility jobs, a work ethic they hoped would translate into fulfilling employment upon their release. This theme confirms past research on a family member's willingness to provide support, if they believe the offender is taking positive steps toward changing his/her behavior (Shapiro & Schwartz, 2001).

***Continued hardships.*** Of the 13 participants, three were parents of sexual offenders, and they substantiated past research findings that the greatest challenge with reentry and reintegration for these offenders are the sex offender registration and notification (SORN) laws, especially as they relate to housing restrictions (Levenson & Tewksbury, 2009). Each of these family members spoke to the tremendous hardships the families face upon the offender's reentry, specifically securing housing with or near the primary support system, as each of the family member's home has children or grandchildren living with or in close proximity to the home. Each participant spoke about the multiple attempts made to the parole board to ensure the offender would adhere to strict SORN laws, but also keep the offender close to the family's home, so they could assist with reentry.

***Roles upon reentry.*** Confirming past research on reentry roles performed by

family members, participants in this study all agreed they would provide emotional support, with just over half stating they would provide both instrumental and emotional support. While past research clearly defined instrumental and emotional support for offender participants (Taylor, 2016), this study allowed the family members to define and outline the terms by which the support would be offered. The purpose of this question relied less on the functional definitions of the type of support and more on how the family felt responsible for providing one or the other, or both. Where this study's results differed slightly from past research, which focused on reentry needs from the offender's perspective, was that the offenders considered emotional support much more necessary to their reintegration success than the instrumental support (Davis et al., 2012). Participants in this study identified that they would provide both forms of support more often, ostensibly with the assumption that both forms would translate to a better chance of reentry success for the offender.

***Responsibility in reentry.*** While some researchers have explored reentry from the family's perspective on what roles they anticipate playing, no identified research has inquired as to the level of responsibility the family member feels in the offender's successful reintegration. This study only resulted in six of the 13 participants providing a clear orientation on their acceptance or refusal of taking on responsibility for their loved one's reintegration. One wife, one grandmother, and one mother described their complete responsibility for ensuring their loved one is successful, while a wife and two mothers declared that they will provide a role, but the offender is entirely responsible for his behavior in reentry. To emphasize her commitment on holding her son accountable, only

one participant stated that she would demand the son work to pay the family back for the financial costs associated with his incarceration.

Responsibility in reentry organically emerged throughout the interviews as participants discussed siblings or children of the offenders. Family members of offenders described their unwillingness and overall discomfort in explaining to the children of the offender, the reasons why their father is incarcerated, and described their resistance as the full responsibility of the offender. While a few participants admitted they have not yet confronted their loved one about their decision to “not get involved” (Participant A15), others have directly addressed their loved one, stating that he is the only one responsible for this task.

***Reentry plan misalignment.*** Though the discussion of reentry plans was not originally designed in this study, the theme of reentry plan misalignment came to light after multiple readings of interview transcripts. Numerous participants referred to their development of reentry plans for the parole board, or they spoke of their ideas for how the offender would reenter the family unit. When follow-up questions sought clarification on the plan details, few emerged, except from the three families of sex offenders, as housing details required complex planning. When asked if the offender participated in the reentry plan development, no participant could concretely admit this coordination had taken place. As described above, reentry planning surrounding the offenders’ children also appeared opaque. In evaluating this current study with past research on the expected roles and responsibilities in reentry, a disconnect between the offender and the family began to develop.

The value of this finding rests in past research that demonstrated that those family members who were more consistently involved in visitation and contact held more realistic expectations of the offender upon their return, and blood relatives were often less likely able to maintain visitation than intimate partners (Naser & Visser, 2006). This study confirmed these earlier findings, when five of the ten participants, who reported significant financial burdens of the loved one's incarceration, explained that they were forced to reduce their visitation and telephone contact. While not explored further, as it was not in the scope of this research, communication and coordination of reentry plans are likely not the topic of discussion among families with limited visitation time and decreasing opportunities for visits.

**Findings under the concept of restorative justice.** During the interviews, I asked participants if they knew of Restorative Justice, a process by which the judicial system aims to restore a sense of justice to the community, from which the offender comes, by having the offender meet with the direct victim and key community members (Bazemore, 1998). I then explained to the participants that this process is most commonly used in juvenile cases, where family members are involved to help curb negative behavior in an effort to keep the juvenile out of the adult judicial system (Connolly, 2006). However, RJ outcome studies have failed to demonstrate the inclusion of family members of adult offenders within the process for similar ends. Because of its relationship to Research Question 2, the family member's perceived roles and responsibility in the offender's reentry, each participant was asked, "If part of the terms of release for your family member included meeting with members of the community,

and even the victim of the crime, how do you see yourself participating in this process?”

One participant stated that she had heard of the concept, but did not know much about it or how to get involved; whereas, each of the other participants had never heard of the process. Without hesitation, 11 of the participants said they would absolutely participate in such a process if it meant that it would help their loved one. Two parents of sex offenders, while they voiced their doubts of the usefulness of the process to their sons' reentry within the community, they too, eventually said that they would do anything to help their son. These responses cannot be compared with prior research, as no currently discovered research has evaluated the family member's perspective of their involvement in an adult offender's RJ case.

The question surrounding RJ was saved for the final interview question, purposefully allowing the participants to reflect on how this process might work for themselves and their loved one. It was during this segment of each interview that the overarching theme of unwavering love and emotional support for the offender coalesced. After the participants discussed their specific roles they would have in the offender's reentry, this element brought out a larger expression of desperation on the family member's part for bringing their loved one home. Additionally, several of the participants noted that this type of process might help alleviate prison overcrowding, as well as “to keep some of these people from ever going to prison to start with” (Participant B01). Past research substantiate these reflections in the reduction of rearrest rates, as well as a reduction in court and incarceration costs (Bouffard, Cooper, & Bergseth, 2016; Strang et al., 2013).

### **Limitations of the Study**

Limitations arose from the execution of the study. The first limitation materialized from the organization, from which the 13 participants came. Though four participant pools were contacted, and coordination with each were executed according to this study's methodological process, all participants originated from only one of the organizations – Texas Inmates Families Association. This group promotes itself as a support group, and each of the participants acknowledged their acceptance and reliance on this organization for such support and coping strategies, such as self-education on the criminal justice system and a space in which to share their grief, anger and healing.

A second limitation occurred in the self-selection for the study; in that, only one man responded to the recruitment flyer. As anticipated in Chapter 1, the majority of respondents were females. I contacted two participating recruitment organizations, and requested that they resend the recruitment flyer to their male population; however, it was never confirmed if this step occurred. Divergent responses may have evolved if more men, within a broader age range, had participated.

A third limitation emerged, and was only considered a limitation once all responses were analyzed, and that was all offenders were male. The recruitment flyer never indicated an inclusion criterion of the offender's gender, as the study aimed to explore the impact of the criminal discovery and legal process upon the family member; however, after the results were analyzed, I questioned if responses would vary if the offender were female. Specifically, would a family member express a more profound



traumatic response if the offender were a daughter or son? Additionally, would the family's role in reentry differ between a son and a daughter returning from incarceration?

A fourth limitation originated from the participants not being asked about their socioeconomic status. This is relevant to prior research on cumulative trauma and its disproportionate impact on individuals in lower socioeconomic categories, as well as those marginalized by race, ethnicity and gender (Myers et al., 2015). While many participants spoke of the financial impact felt upon the family for the offender's behavior, no real conclusions can be drawn on the broader socioeconomic differences, aspects of marginalization, and the perceptions of victimization and trauma.

A final limitation rested with my ability to bracket any assumptions or experiences I may have had regarding victimization and offender reentry. I experienced direct victimization on several occasions throughout my life; however, I have never been a family member of an offender, and therefore have never considered the personal impact that the offense and subsequent reentry might cause for me. I have also taught inmates on the psychosocial aspects of reentry and accepting personal responsibility. I approached each interview with the intent of capturing only the individual's personal experience, and accurately documented when they did not experience a sense of victimization, reported no responsibility for the offender's reentry and reintegration or indicated they would not be interested in participating in an RJ process. I maintained a personal distance from each of the participant's accounts, and meticulously reported on the individual's statements, ensuring that their statements were theirs alone.

### **Recommendations**

This study added to the limited existing research on offender families, and created new opportunities for expanded research. Families have long been recognized as a critical component to lessening the risk of offender recidivism, therefore meriting additional exploration into understanding their perspectives, concerns and needs. Recommendations for future research evolved from observed limitations within the current study, as well as the need for continued focus on the offender's family and coordinated reentry plans to ensure realistic expectations.

This study's participant pool acknowledged a broad array of effective coping mechanisms, including self-education and frequent access to friends, family and strong support groups, either through their religious affiliations or through TIFA. While one participant reported an extramarital affair, no additional unhealthy or ineffective tools, such as substance use or a closing off from their communities, were recorded. These results likely reflect only a portion of coping mechanisms experienced by family members of offenders. To address the first limitation, future research on offender family members should draw from a much broader participant pool. This study drew from only one community participant, a very active and engaging support group, TIFA. While this group's participation was instrumental in the generation of participants, individuals not associated with support groups or like-minded affiliations should be sought to expand insight into where and how families seek support and adjustment to being engaged with the criminal justice system. This may require significant effort to engage the reentry and parole divisions within state criminal justice systems.

The second recommendation stems from the need to broaden the participant pool both in familial attachment and socioeconomic status to gain perhaps a broader perspective on aspects of family trauma, especially with regards to findings on cumulative trauma. This expansion should also incorporate a broader inclusion of the gender of the offender. Men, as parents, siblings, or spouses, should be actively recruited to discover if any differences arise in victimization affect, coping mechanisms, support or reentry expectations. Though not included in this study's findings, as the statements were made anecdotally, four mothers, during the course of their interviews, revealed that their husbands were not supportive of the sons' behavior, current financial burdens and future reentry plans, which begged the need to include men within a study on family victimization.

A final recommendation includes a deeper exploration into the family's process of reentry planning. This should include not only the evaluation of reentry details and the family's expectations, but the measurement of coordination between the family and the offender. This recommendation came from identification within my own work with offenders and the findings in this research study. Again, this evaluation comes, not through research but anecdotal evidence, but exposes a significant gap in communication between key participants within the reentry process.

### **Implications**

This study's findings can have broad social engagement and policy implications that can create social change as it relates to families of offenders, the offenders themselves and the interaction of these players within communities. Developing policies

on collaboratively engaging family members within the judicial and reentry process and creating opportunities for new RJ practices, to more broadly include adult offenders and their family members, may help ensure a more interactive and committed approach to reducing recidivism.

When I set out to investigate the level of victimization, experienced by offender family members, the resulting outcome was surprising. Where I expected to uncover feelings of anger, deep disappointment, frustration and sadness toward the offender, whether a first-time or a repeat offender, these feelings of victimization directed toward the criminal justice system was unexpected. Family members expressed deep resentment and anger toward a system, they believe, treats the family with great disrespect and “as a criminal”, even though these family members demonstrate continued support for their loved one, and anticipate serving as their support system upon their release. There is much to be gained from policy development within the criminal justice system by including family members throughout all stages, from better education of family members on judicial processes, pleas and sentencing outcomes, facility expectations, and coordinated parole and probation involvement with the offender. As players within the judicial system begin to accept that family members can become advocates for the offender’s positive change, family members may be treated less like adversaries and more as allies in the process of reducing recidivism.

An example of this collaboration may be a daily orientation, made available to interested family members at each facility. The orientation can review the levels of security, roles and responsibilities of the staff, inmate behavioral or cognitive programs

available at each facility, expected rules of behavior by the inmates, and rules for visitors. This direct communication between members of “the system” and family members may help reduce miscommunication and misunderstanding between the inmates and their family, may help minimize possible manipulation by the inmate to gain the family’s sympathy, and may decrease feelings of alienation and assumptions made by family members because information is not shared or available. As family members are afforded the opportunity to engage with “the system”, they are likely to become more socially engaged with helping to change legislation that impacts their incarcerated loved one, and less angry at a system, in which they feel no power.

The findings also made clear that “the system” and offender families must play a more integrated role in reentry planning for all inmates. Shollenberger’s 2009 study of returning inmates reconfirmed prior studies’ results that male inmates more often returned to parents and intimate partners, while women returned to children or grandchildren. While some inmates may not have a defined support system, to which they will return, many do. This current study pointed to a gap in coordination between reentry expectations and plans between family members and the returning offenders. Positive social change in successful reintegration will occur as these parties’ plans and expectations better align. An example of coordinated efforts might be through the parole board, the inmate and the designated family support system. Upon determination of an inmate’s upcoming parole, the family would be requested to provide a list of their expectations and instrumental support they are willing to provide. This would then be compared with what is demanded by the parole board, and what expectations and

requests are made by the inmate. The expectations and plans are then adjusted to meet the needs of all three parties, which will create a more realistic roadmap for the inmate and family to follow upon the inmate's release.

Finally, this study provided additional support for the inclusion of and willingness by family members to operate within an RJ process for adult offenders. Restorative Justice aims to address the harm committed by offenders upon individuals, including the direct victim, members within the community (Braithwaite, 1998; Gavrielides, 2011), and in the case of this study, the offender's family. A couple of participants expressed interest in RJ as a means of reducing the incarcerated populations, but more of the participants recognized RJ as an opportunity to rebuild trust between the offender, the family and the community into which the offender returns. As family members expressed their sense of victimization they, too, can achieve a level of empowerment traditionally given to direct victims in this process by airing their sadness, loss, helplessness and fear (terms of victimization identified in this study) in a collaborative setting, in which the offender is expected to accept responsibility for his or her crimes and make a path for community reintegration. Findings from this research can help facilitate the dialogue with policymakers to create greater opportunities for RJ programs to include family members within the process, if not only for a goal of creating alternative pathways to incarceration, but for new opportunities to help ensure successful reentry opportunities.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of conducting this phenomenological qualitative study was to explore the level of victimization and emotional trauma experienced by offender families.

Additionally, the purpose was to examine the family member's perceptions of necessary support and community empathy to perform their anticipated roles in the offender's reentry. At the start of the research, a significant gap existed in the literature with this population, which provided ample space to discuss with participants their feelings of victimization, their activities aimed at healing their personal pain, and their anticipated roles and responsibilities within the offender's reentry process.

The 13 participants were eager to share their stories, deeply personal and expressed with pain, shame and guilt, but with profound passion, love and support for their incarcerated loved one, irrespective of the type of crime committed, or the number of times they have been incarcerated. While they each described several terms related to their perceived victimization, some which were directed at the behavior of their loved ones, the target of their emotional turmoil was that of the criminal justice system, believed to have treated the offender and the family with scorn, indifference and injustice. As the conversations shifted from the offender's behavior to the displeasure with "the system," a sense of denial of the offender's culpability became apparent, but the purpose of the study was to examine the families' perceived victimization, and their responses were succinct and directed. This unexpected finding lends itself to future exploration into the relationship the criminal justice system and offender families might develop to better collaborate for the offenders' eventual return to communities.

Participants in this study presented uniformity in effective coping mechanisms and overall continued relationships with friends, other family members, and the community at large. While this finding was also largely unexpected, it illuminates the

strength that support groups, aimed specifically at this population, might have for overall emotional and educational support for offender family members, struggling to understand their loss and the pathway to their loved one's reentry.

While all of the participants accepted roles of emotional support, roughly half of them agreed to provide instrumental support, primarily in terms of housing and assistance with securing employment for the offender upon his reentry. When asked about their feelings of responsibility for the offender's successful reintegration, only half of the participants provided a response, which was divided between taking on complete responsibility and ensuring the offender assumed the responsibility. During this point in the interviews, participants responded with less clarity and assurance, shedding light on the finding that clear reentry plans had not been developed, shared or coordinated with the offender, which presents a challenge for successful reintegration. Research has consistently shown that a strong support system lowers recidivism rates; however, coordinated expectations between offenders and their support system can only help improve on their successes. These findings present new opportunities for research as well as policy development between parole divisions, family members and the offender.

Once presented with the concept of RJ, participants eagerly reported an interest in having this as an option, not only for securing an alternative approach to incarceration, but to aiding their loved one with the community reintegration process. While this approach is more commonly used for redirecting juveniles, future research and policy development would benefit greatly by including family members of adult offenders within this process, as this study identified a clear readiness for their membership.



Though the findings from this study draw no definitive conclusions on the degree to which offender family members have been victimized or the clear approach to reentry they may take with their loved one, this study does add to the limited body of research on offender family members. This study also offers a guide for future research and provides some direction for policy and program design, with the offender family as an active stakeholder. Each participant expressed gratitude for the chance to be heard, a sign that their voices get lost in the discussion of who is the victim of criminal behavior.

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## Appendix A: Participant Matrix

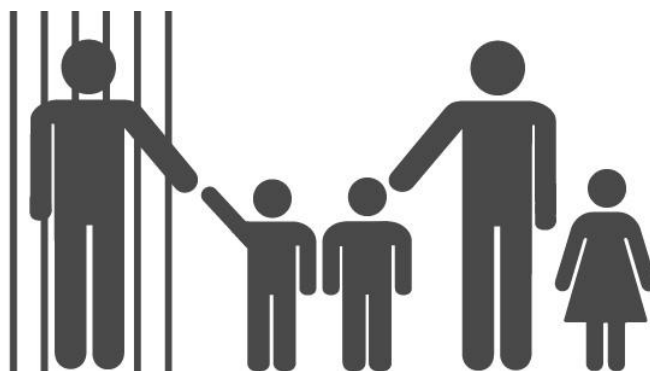
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## Appendix B: Participant Recruitment Announcement

## Be an Advocate for Offender Families

Are you a family member of a loved one who is incarcerated?

Are you part of their re-entry?



A doctoral candidate is seeking participants to explore the experiences of family members, whose loved ones are incarcerated and the roles they anticipate for helping the offenders reintegrate back into the community.

Offender families experience their own levels of victimization and trauma, resulting from the offending behavior and loss of the family member to the criminal justice system. This study intends to explore these experiences by giving the family members a voice to better understand their fears, strengths and challenges with the incarceration and future community re-entry.

**If you want to be a part of this important conversation,  
please call: \_\_\_\_\_**

**or**

**Email: \_\_\_\_\_**

**If selected for this study, you will receive \$30 upon completion of the study.**

## Appendix C: Participant Study Procedures

### Participant Recruitment

1. Organizations with access to offender family members provide study participant recruitment announcements.
2. Interested persons contact researcher via telephone or email, as provided on the recruitment announcement.
3. The researcher asks the individual for their preferred method of receiving a copy of the Participant Study Procedures and Consent to Participate form. This may be through the U.S. postal service, email, or fax.
4. The researcher asks to schedule the participant for an initial screening interview.
  - a. This initial interview asks for demographic information and questions pertaining to inclusion and exclusion criteria.
  - b. This interview will be conducted over the telephone.
  - c. This interview will be audio-recorded for accuracy.
  - d. This interview is anticipated to last between five and seven minutes.
  - e. If a candidate is ineligible for participation, they will be notified on the telephone at the time of the screening interview.
5. The researcher enters all interview-obtained demographic information into a participant matrix to ensure a broad and diverse population of participants.
6. Between 15 and 17 participants will be selected for participation.
7. Each selected participant will be contacted to schedule the face-to-face study interview.

**Participant Interview Scheduling**

1. The researcher will schedule face-to-face interviews with each participant, based on:
  - a. The participant's preferred date and time
  - b. If the participant does not prefer to conduct the interview in their home, or if privacy and confidentiality cannot be ensured, the researcher will secure a private location, which is convenient to the participant and will allow audio-recording equipment. This may include settings such as a conference room in a hotel or a private room at a local library.
  - c. If the researcher must secure an alternate location, the researcher and participant may need to negotiate on a new date and time for the interview.
2. If follow-up or clarification questions arise, the researcher will contact the participant by telephone for completion.

**Participant Interview**

1. On the day of the scheduled interview:
  - a. The researcher will arrive to the site early and will have all audio equipment ready.
  - b. The researcher will provide water and light snacks.
  - c. The participant agrees to have their telephone turned "off" during the entire time of the scheduled interview to limit distractions.
  - d. The participant may bring any information about their family member they wish to provide, including but not limited to: pictures, letters, or

documents. The researcher, however, does not require any additional information.

- e. The participant will sign the Consent to Participate form.
2. Each interview is expected to last no longer than one and a half hours.
    - a. The researcher will ask each participant the same questions in an effort to discover themes within the responses.
    - b. The research questions relate to the participant's lived experiences of being a family member to an individual who has committed a crime, and seek to explore:
      - i. If the family member feels victimized by the offender's behavior
      - ii. How or if this victimization has left the family member traumatized
      - iii. What role the family member anticipates in the offender's reentry
      - iv. What support the family has or needs to fulfill this anticipated role
  3. As each participant is a volunteer in the study, they may, at any time, withdraw without any consequence.

### **Post Interview**

1. Upon completion of the interview, each participant will be debriefed on the purpose of the research study and ask if they have additional comments or suggestions.
2. Each participant, upon completion of the interview, will receive \$30.

3. The researcher will provide mental health resource information, should the participant want to pursue assistance following the interview. These resources will be provided in the community for free or on a sliding-scale.
4. After the audio-recorded interview is transcribed, the participant will receive a copy, allowing time for them to make corrections or clarifications. This document can be mailed or e-mailed to the participant, based on their preference. This is done to ensure accuracy of the interview data. While this step is not required of the participants, it will be encouraged so their feedback enhances the accuracy of the findings. No participant identifying information will be provided to the individual responsible for transcription services, as this will not be conducted by the researcher. Corrections will be made over the telephone and will be audio-recorded.
5. After the researcher codes and develops preliminary study interpretations, a 1-2 page summary of findings will be sent to each participant, offering each the opportunity to make corrections or additions. The summary will be either emailed or mailed through the U.S. post to each participant, based on their preference of receipt. Corrections will be made over the telephone and will be audio-recorded. An associate researcher will review codes and developed themes as a method of peer-review; however, all data sent to this researcher will remain anonymous.



## Appendix D: Consent to Participate

You are taking part in a research study about your experiences as a family member of a criminal offender. This offender is currently incarcerated, but will be returning to the community. In your first telephone screening interview, you stated that you are a family member, to whom the offender will return; therefore, your role in their reentry is very important. This form outlines the study design, study process, procedures for the study results and your rights before you decide to participate in this study.

This study is being conducted by Catherine Pfeiffer, a doctoral student researcher at Walden University. Results from this study will be contained in her dissertation, titled “Offender Families as Victims and Their Role in Offender Reintegration”.

### **Background Information:**

The study has two purposes: (1) to explore the level of victimization and trauma in adult family members of incarcerated offenders, by asking about their experiences from the moment of arrest and throughout the judicial process, and (2) to discover the offender family member’s ability to cope with their lives and if they have emotional or psychological support to help their family member reenter society. This ability to support a released offender is a very important step to make sure the offender does not return to jail or prison.

### **Procedures:**

Participant role - If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

- Take part in a face-to-face, audio-recorded interview. The interview may last approximately one to one and a half hours.
- Provide follow-up answers if the researcher has extra questions. This may be done in a brief follow-up telephone call.
- Participate in reading a written copy of your interview answers to make sure they are the answers you gave. This step is not required of you, but this helps to make sure findings from the study correctly report your statements and beliefs.
- Please do not discuss this study or your responses to anyone, especially on social media, until six months following your interview.

Researcher role - If you agree to participate in this study, the researcher agrees to:

- Assign you with a participant code (a number) for analysis and reporting, to make sure your identity remains private and confidential.

- Audio-record all conversations to make certain all questions and answers are collected correctly.
- Provide you with a written form of your interview answers and a 1-2 page summary of findings to check if your ideas are correct and complete.

**Sample Interview Questions:**

- (1) Describe your relationship with the offender.
- (2) What feelings did you experience after your family member was arrested for the crime?
- (3) Describe the emotions you felt throughout the process of the trial?
- (4) What physical reactions did you experience throughout the entire legal process, from the arrest until now?
- (5) How did this criminal experience affect you financially?
- (6) How has this experience affected your relationships with friends/neighbors/other family members?
- (7) How have you tried to manage your life without your family member?

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you do not want to participate, even after the interview has started, you are welcome to do so.

**Risks and Benefits of the Study:**

There are no expected risks for your participation in this study, but interview questions may become stressful or upsetting to answer. If you experience the need to get help from a mental health provider after the interview, the researcher will give you resource information for this follow-up.

You may experience fatigue (tired feeling) during the interview. The researcher will provide water and light snacks during the interview, should you experience fatigue. The interview time of one to one and a half hours can be extended, based on your needs. It is suggested that you schedule your interview when you expect to be rested and not distracted. To limit distractions for you and the researcher, it is requested that cell phones are turned off during the interview.

This study may provide benefits to you, as your answers may help create future policies for families of criminal offenders, in securing resources for reentry. You may also benefit

by having a place of privacy and confidentiality to express ongoing concerns for yourself and family.

**Payment:**

After the interview is over, you will be given \$30 for your participation.

**Privacy:**

All information you give the researcher will remain private and confidential. No information received from you will be used outside of this research study. Your name will only be collected on the first participant screening form, which was completed in the first phone interview. During that first phone call, a participant code (a number) was assigned, and only that code will be used throughout the research process, including all information gathering, analysis and reporting.

Your face-to-face interview will be done at a location of your choice, where you have privacy and confidentiality of all information. If you are not able to find such a location, the researcher will locate a private conference room, which will be convenient for you.

All hard-copy data will be kept in a locked file cabinet for seven years, following completion of the study; after which, this data will be destroyed. Electronic data, including all audio-recordings, transcriptions and any tabulations will be stored on a back-up hard drive, accessible only through the researcher's password-protected private computer. This electronic data will be destroyed after seven years, following completion of the study.

**Contacts and Questions:**

If you have any questions about anything contained in this Consent to Participate form, or anything about the study that has not been yet addressed, please ask the researcher before signing this form. Should you have any questions throughout the study, please contact the researcher at \_\_\_\_\_ or via email at \_\_\_\_\_. All questions will be followed up with an email response for documentation purposes.

If you have questions about your rights as a participant, you may reach Dr. Leilani Endicott, the Walden University representative. This study has been assigned an approval

number 07-18-17-0537790, which expires on July 17<sup>th</sup>, 2018. You may reference this number in your call to Walden University at 612.312.1210.

**Statement of Consent**

I have read the above Consent to Participate document. I have been given the chance to ask questions, and have received answers to my satisfaction. With my name and signature below, I agree to take part in the research study.

Printed Name of Participant

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Date of Consent

---

Participant's Signature

---

Researcher's Signature

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**A copy of this form will be given to you for your records.**

## Appendix E: Screening Interview Questions

*Thank you for your interest in being a part of this research study. I need to inform you that this phone call is being recorded for purposes of accuracy and research integrity. Are you okay with this call being recorded?*    **YES**    **NO**

*The researcher has provided you a copy of the Participant Study Procedures and a Consent to Participate form, and if you are selected to participate in this study, you will be asked to sign the Consent to Participate form at the start of the face-to-face interview. This screening interview is meant to provide the researcher with enough details about you to select the most appropriate candidates for the research study. Do you have any questions before we begin?*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Numerical Code: \_\_\_\_\_ Primary Contact Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Address of residence (for mailing of forms and transcripts, if preferred):

\_\_\_\_\_

Email address (for sending forms and transcripts, if preferred):

\_\_\_\_\_

1. What is your gender?                      **MALE**                      **FEMALE**

2. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_

3. To which of the following ethnic groups do you identify?

American Indian or Alaska Native

Asian

Black

Hispanic or Latino

Native American or Pacific Islander

White/Caucasian

4. Do you consider yourself to be a member of any of the following marginalized communities?

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT)      Disabled  
Religious minority

5. Do you have a    STRONG    MODERATE    or    NO    religious affiliation?

6. What is your relationship to the offender? \_\_\_\_\_

7. Do you anticipate the offender will live with you, or seek primary support from you?

YES                      NO

8. Which one of the four types of crime did the offender commit?

PROPERTY                      VIOLENT                      SEXUAL                      DRUG

9. Did the offender commit the crime, for which they are currently incarcerated, against you? *(If a clarifying question is asked, the following example will be given: For example, did the offender assault you?)*      YES                      NO

10. Is the offender currently serving a life sentence without the possibility of parole?

YES                      NO

11. If selected to participate in the study do you agree to the following:

I agree to be audio-recorded                      YES                      NO

12. If selected, do you prefer to be interviewed in your home?      YES                      NO

Can you ensure that this environment will not have distractions and is safe for both you and the researcher?                      YES                      NO

If no, do you prefer to be interviewed at a safe location chosen by the researcher (such as a church or office space)?                      YES                      NO

13. Are you currently under psychiatric treatment?                      YES                      NO

Please comment how comfortable you are conducting a potentially emotional  
interview: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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### Researcher Notes

Candidate meets inclusion requirements                      YES                      NO

Candidate excluded from study                      YES                      NO

Candidate informed of exclusion on telephone                      YES                      NO

Reason(s) for exclusion

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix F: Participant Interview Questions

Participant Numerical Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

*Hello. My name is Catherine Pfeiffer, and I am the researcher for this study. Thank you for taking the time to be a part of this important research. Throughout my own research to support the need for this study, I have found very little information about the impact that family members endure, once they have discovered that a loved one has committed a crime. There exists even less information on how those family members cope with their loss, prepare for the offender's eventual return and plan for their own role with the offender's reentry.*

*At the time that you expressed an interest in this study, I sent you a Consent to Participate form. I would like to review it with you at this time. (READ FORM AND ACQUIRE CONSENT)*

Consent to Participate Form Signed?            Y            N

*Before we begin the interview, I would like to remind you that our session will be audio-recorded, as you have given your consent for this procedure. Additionally, I will be writing down some of your answers, and making notes as we progress through the interview. The first several questions will provide background information about you and the offender, which will be reported in the study results in a numerical fashion. If you have any questions throughout the interview, please feel free to ask. Do you have any questions, before we begin?*

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**1. Demographics and Background**

- 1.1 What is the gender of your incarcerated family member? \_\_\_\_\_
- 1.2 What is the age of your incarcerated family member? \_\_\_\_\_
- 1.3a Is this the first time your family member has been incarcerated? \_\_\_\_\_
- 1.3b If no, how many times has he/she been incarcerated? \_\_\_\_\_
- 1.4 Where is your family member incarcerated? \_\_\_\_\_
- 1.5 How often do you see your family member? \_\_\_\_\_
- 1.6 How often do you speak with your family member? \_\_\_\_\_
- 1.7 Approximately, how much time does it take to travel to visit your family member?  
\_\_\_\_\_

**2. Personal Meaning of Victimization and Trauma**

- 2.1 Can you think back to a time in your life when you felt like a victim of an event, and describe for me the feelings you experienced?
- 2.2 Describe your relationship with the offender.
  - i. How would you describe your closeness?
  - ii. Can you describe some events that you have experienced with this person?
- 2.3 Please detail your feelings that you experienced after you discovered your family member was arrested for the crime?
- 2.4 In as much detail as possible, please describe the emotions you felt throughout the process of the trial?
- 2.5 What physical reactions did you experience throughout the entire legal process, from the arrest until now? (Clarification might include: How did

you sleep or eat? Did you have to visit the doctor frequently and for what?

Have you been diagnosed with a serious illness? Did you receive any medications for psychological or medical concerns?)

- 2.6 How has this criminal experience affected you financially?
- 2.7 How has this experience affected your relationships with friends/neighbors/other family members or even your larger community?
- 2.8 Describe your feelings toward the offender since the arrest until now.
- 2.9 How have you tried to manage your life without the offender?
- 2.10 At the beginning of this interview, I asked about a time when you felt victimized. Describe any similarities between those feelings and the feelings after your loved one was arrested, sentenced and incarcerated for their crime?

### **3. Personal Definition of Reintegration Role and Responsibility**

- 3.1 Describe how you might feel about being responsible for the offender's reintegration.
  - 3.2 How would you define your role within the reintegration process?
  - 3.3 Based on everything you have just now told me, what do you think you need to have to be prepared for when \_\_\_\_\_ returns home, ready to reenter society?
  - 3.4 How are you currently finding support for your own needs during this time away from your loved one?
-

**3.5** What other tools or support do you feel you need to help yourself and \_\_\_\_\_ with reentry?

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**3.6** *The next question is hypothetical and describes only one aspect of possible reentry and reintegration*

If part of the terms of release for \_\_\_\_\_ included meeting with members of the community and even the victim of the crime, how do you see yourself participating in this process? \_\_\_\_\_

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### **Study Debriefing**

*We have now reached the end of the structured portion of the interview.*

*I would now like to get your thoughts on the study and if you have anything you would like to add that might be important to the study that I have left out.*

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*We have discussed very personal and private information and sometimes discussing these events brings up unaddressed feelings. I would like to ask you how you are feeling after this interview.*

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*If you feel the need to discuss your feelings with a mental health professional in your area, I have some resources that might help. Would you like a copy of this?*

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*As a reminder from your signed Consent to Participate, please do not discuss this study or your interview responses for at least six months, as this study is ongoing, and you may know others who may be participating. Their knowledge of your responses may damage the study's integrity.*

*I greatly appreciate the time you have spent with me on this research. I will contact you when this interview has been transcribed so I can get you a copy. Please review the copy and let me know of any errors, so that I may correct them.*

*Also, after all the interviews are completed, I will provide you a draft of the study findings, so that you can provide feedback to ensure that my interpretations are accurate. Do you have any questions before we conclude?*

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Hand the participant the \$30 stipend and thank them again).

Recording stops after the participant has left.

### Appendix G: Transcriptionist Confidentiality Agreement

It is understood and agreed to that the below identified discloser of confidential information may provide certain information that is and must be kept confidential. To ensure the protection of such information, and to preserve confidentiality, it is agreed that:

1. The Confidential Information to be disclosed can be described as and includes:  
Research study data, as collected through audio-recorded interviews. No identifying information will be intentionally provided in these interviews; however, throughout the interview duration, specific information may be provided, such as names, descriptions of individuals, specific criminal behavior, legal processes and information pertaining to offender reentry.
2. The Recipient agrees not to disclose any confidential information obtained from audio-recordings and subsequent digital reproductions in the form of transcribed data to anyone, except the researcher of this study.
3. This Agreement states the entire agreement between the parties concerning the disclosure of Confidential Information. Any addition or modification to this Agreement must be made in writing and signed by the parties.

**WHEREFORE**, the parties acknowledge that they have read and understand this Agreement and voluntarily accept the duties and obligations set forth herein.

Recipient of Confidential Information (Transcriptionist Name):

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Discloser of Confidential Information (Researcher):

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_